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A NEW VIEW OF THE PLAYS  
OF RACINE





A NEW VIEW  
OF THE PLAYS OF  
RACINE

BY  
VERA ORGEL, PH.D.

LECTURER IN FRENCH  
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN

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## PREFACE

THIS is the first detailed discussion in English of the plays of Racine. It offers what is, I believe, a new analysis of Racine's conception of the tragic. It seems to me that the nature of the tragic catastrophe as found in Racine's plays has not been sufficiently observed. The various forms in which disaster appears have obscured the common element.

I have treated *Athalie* as Racine's most representative selection from reality, the play in which he has dramatized most of the causes of disaster. I have tried to show in *Athalie* the development of tendencies present in Racine from the first. I have not been able to find *Athalie* either more or less religious than Racine's earlier plays, and it does not seem to me to be mainly concerned with the struggle between Church and State.

I should like to express my gratitude to Dr. O. S. Skeffington for reading the whole manuscript and making many valuable suggestions; to Professor M. F. Liddell and Professor H. O. White for their interest and encouragement; and, above all, to the late Professor T. B. Rudmose-Brown, whose edition of *Andromaque* led me to read and enjoy the other plays as well, and who encouraged me to write on Racine.

VERA ORGEL

DUBLIN, 1946

## NOTE

Literary criticism can never be a science. It can resemble a science in some ways, but its conclusions cannot be satisfactorily embodied in a set of formulae. The whole work of art itself is the only satisfactory representative of the matter examined. Criticism that is of any use creates a desire to read, whether for the first time or the hundredth, the work discussed. It is hoped that this book will be of such use.

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## INTRODUCTION

**J**EAN RACINE lived for sixty years, from 1639 to 1699. He has left one comedy and eleven tragedies of which one, *Alexandre*, is of interest mainly because he wrote it. With the exception of his first extant play, *La Thébàide*, the others are important in their own right, and each would merit fame though he had written nothing else.

(The principle underlying all the activity of the age, politics as well as art, was unification — the organization of everything into a harmonious whole. The harmony in Racine is so perfect that it has been called monotonous, because of the reader's failure to grasp, beneath the perfection of outward form, the underlying discords and contrasts as painful and as striking as in untransfigured life. It is the genius of Racine to unite the unfailing grace of art with the unimpaired vitality of life in the raw.

Racine was a Jansenist and a student of Greek drama. The predestination of the doctrine of grace and the fatality of Greek tragedy have in common the victimization of man by some great force beyond his control, conceived according to the age and race of the thinker, as fate, the will of the gods, the will of God, or nowadays, as heredity and environment. (All Racine's characters are the victims of fate, whichever view of fate is taken. They are doomed to be themselves. They cannot escape themselves and live, for there is no value in life for them unless they can respond to it in the individual and forbidden way which makes them what they are. They usually prefer the sacrifice of life to the renunciation of all that gives life significance for them. They are not destroyed as personalities, but each still



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characteristically himself, they are cut off from life, which has become impossible to them. They will live as themselves or not at all. The appeal of the characters is so great that we are in danger of forgetting the reasons for which we might have condemned them, were they less strongly themselves, and our resentment at their destruction is perhaps the measure of its necessity, from the point of view of the order against which they sinned.

( Racine has expressed the most brutal forms of passion in language acceptable to the strict censor, Versailles. There is a parallel between the restraint imposed on Racine in the presentation of passion and the restraint imposed on the passion itself by the higher levels of the mind. In the plays of Racine the passions of man are disciplined not only by convention, the consciousness of society, but also by the individual consciousness, and yet nowhere in literature are the passions more irresistible or more indestructible.)

( Although the characters in a Racinian tragedy are always kings, queens, princes or princesses, they are royal in our imagination less because of their crowns than because of their unforgettable human dignity. We hardly dare to pity them because of their emotional splendour, or to wish them different because of the loss to ourselves.) The plots are familiar to us, we know what is going to happen to everyone, and yet there is tension, expectancy, the constant being taken unaware by what we should have expected, because here there is being demonstrated to us without shame or pity the thing that is the human spirit.

In Racine there is clarity and order in the very delirium and chaos of the mind and yet it does not cease to be delirium and chaos; the speaker knows his passion and his madness for what they are, but he is helpless against them. This is the function of the reason in Racine, to watch and be helpless, yet never to be merely a spectator but to remain a part, the conscious part, of the erring, irresistible force rushing as quickly as possible to destruction. The difficulty is not to tell a story in twenty-four

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hours, to observe the famous unities, but rather to keep the vital uncompromising spirit of man in the world of his unattainable desire long enough to show what manner of thing it is, how it expends its energy in suffering and causing to suffer until the moment of its death. In Racine the desire is shining bright, the quintessence of life, and the heroes are blessed by the gods in being magnificently worthy of it and cursed by the gods because it is denied them until they die in search of it, and every step in the action of the tragedy brings them, pulsing with life, nearer to the instant of their appointed death, when all the splendid daring of the individual soul aspiring towards its own ends in face of the immense hostility or indifference of the universe is stilled for ever. These are the great representatives of mankind. What these people did with their little portion of time is a legend because it reminds us what we are or might have been, it demonstrates the condition of the race of man. As the light fades in the last day of their lives and the tragedy is ended, we know what they were and what they wanted, and feel that there is nothing else, nothing that is not tragedy in the hours of their tragedy. Here is a great destruction, it matters little to us that other things survive. Racine has imposed a mood, created a world which no irrelevance can invade. The master of association, this greatest poet, disposes of our mind's resources, leaves us not a shred of thought that is ours. We think of nothing that he has not told ; we are completely his.

One of the aims of this book is to be of service to those, and they are many, who, in spite of their acquaintance with the period, its literary and social conventions and the range of activity to which they gave form, can only accept the prestige that is Racine's in France on trust as merited, but have themselves small share in the pleasure which gave rise to that prestige. For newcomers to Racine, I have given a minimum amount of information about the man and his period:

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The method I have adopted seems to me imposed by the nature of Racine's drama. Since each play of Racine's is an organic whole, a speech cannot be detached from its context without great danger of misinterpretation. A character cannot be taken out of the setting which explains it and helped to make it what it was, and adequately considered only in relation to other characters in other plays, in a general chapter on Racine's psychology. This man is not primarily a psychologist or even a poet. He is a dramatist ; that is to say that he uses his psychology and poetry for a purpose and does not see them as ends in themselves, and for this reason it is using an inappropriate method to consider these things in themselves in attempting to understand and appreciate his plays. The extent to which this can justifiably be done is the extent to which he may be said to have failed as a dramatist.<sup>1</sup> Everything in Racine's plays forms one miraculously harmonious whole and contributes to one end. In this he reflects the efficient organization which characterized every form of activity in his age. His psychology is not to be detached and considered in a separate compartment but treated as motivating power inseparable from the particular behaviour it accompanies in individual people in the play concerned. A different treatment might be useful in compiling a history of psycho-analysis as it appears in literature, or in a study in comparative literature, or again in an essay drawing attention to particular points which have been neglected elsewhere or paying homage in a general way. But to show why that homage is deserved, to discover the greatness of Racine, it is not wise to take to pieces what he has put together in a play. He is not great for his discoveries in psychology or philosophy, the information he gives can be found more easily in text-books. To systematize his views on these subjects in separate chapters gives knowledge

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Skeffington has pointed out to me the relevance of what Macaulay says in the essay "Moore's Life of Lord Byron" : "It is not too much to say that the great plays of Shakespeare would lose less by being deprived of all the passages which are commonly called the fine passages, than those passages lose by being read separately from the play. This is perhaps the highest praise which can be given to a dramatist"

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about him, certainly, but he could have held these views and written very bad plays. It is necessary to show how these separate elements resulted in some of the world's greatest plays, for in that, and not in themselves, lies their greatest significance.

It seems to me, therefore, that the best way to try to discover and indicate the greatness of a play of Racine is to begin at the beginning and follow the course of action to the end. Failure to remember what is happening off-stage and to notice the impenetrability of some of the characters, that they hear only their own thoughts all the time in spite of what is being said to them, has hampered appreciation of many of Racine's plays. We must notice the sequence of events, and that implies the sequence of thoughts, for the thoughts are for him the most eventful, the most human, part of a history ; the external outcome might perhaps have been forcibly prevented in life, but how prevent the thought and recognize it in its disguises ? We must notice not only what is said but what has just been said and what is to follow, for that is his way of indicating not only a conscious thought but a whole state of mind.

It should be apparent from this that to select five or six or a dozen speeches and offer them as samples of a play by Racine is to misrepresent him. Something is happening all the time in a play by Racine, and the poetry makes us know almost what it feels like to have it happen, the dazing pain, the sense of shock, the slight dart of hope, it involves us to a greater extent than prose in the predicament of the characters, occupies senses as well as reason so that no wandering part of the mind can escape this tragic spectacle and find relief elsewhere. That, I think, is the greatness of Racine, the almost hypnotic power of his verse to shut us into a tragic world, unlike our own in many ways, with a sense of urgency that everything fine and lovely and alive is rushing to destruction and must do so, for there is nothing for them if they turn the other way ; he impresses us with the reality of their point of view for the duration of the play, so that

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we accept their needs as necessary, and vicariously have a deeper need and deeper loss than the multiplicity and haste of life give frequently, or for long, or allow us to express. This is tragedy with no diversion. It expresses part of man's experience, what everyone has known in little and been compelled to silence and ignore and perhaps at last forget. Here, when the crisis is past, life does not go on—measuring the catastrophe by the general view—but all is dead. Honour is paid to grief and to loss that in our lives we cannot afford to pay, and something is relieved in man that would be loyal to the ruined hope yet still live on. It is not a reproduction of the conditions of life ; it is consummate art. To dismember it is to make people wonder why Racine is held in such repute if he portrays a gallery of maniacs in antiquated costumes and illustrates a view of life no longer generally held, and to be studied more easily elsewhere. It is this method of dismembering which is responsible for most of the misapprehensions about Racine now firmly rooted in many minds. The poetry of Racine survives every treatment, but its appeal is invariably greater when it is left in its context.

## La Thébaïde

1664

OF his first play, *La Thébaïde*, Racine says : " La catastrophe de ma pièce est peut-être un peu trop sanglante. En effet, il n'y paroît presque pas un acteur qui ne meure à la fin. Mais aussi c'est *La Thébaïde*. C'est à dire le sujet le plus tragique de l'antiquité." But Racine's play is not a tragedy because of the number of deaths that occur in it. A tragedy is not to be judged like an epidemic. *Bérénice*, in which no one dies, is far more tragic than *La Thébaïde* in which hardly anyone survives. For Racine tragedy is a spiritual event, of which death may be the inevitable result. Death is often the end of the tragedy with Racine, but it does not in itself constitute tragedy. There is no more final, mysterious and theatrical exit than death, but in these plays the tragic thing is not that man is mortal, nor that he has by his own fault brought about an untimely death, but that life has become worthless. The tragic loss of the one thing through which life has significance is the catastrophe which precedes death in Racine's tragedies, and that there is usually only one thing at stake gives the unity and intensity of interest to his plays from which all other unities necessarily follow as the conditions of its preservation. ( Man and fate are unscrupulous enemies in Racine, and tragedy is that smiting of the spirit by circumstances which may leave man alive but robs his life of significance. Or else the sense of tragedy arises from the spectacle of a character whose fulfilment involves self-destruction and ruin to others.

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Racine's first play is concerned with the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, the children of incest. As usual in the plays of Racine the tragedy of the characters has begun long before the beginning of the play, which presents only the crisis, revealing it remorselessly as the inevitable result of all that has happened before these final twenty-four hours of life, chosen by the dramatist because they are the most tense and decisive, in short the most dramatic hours, those which best serve his purpose. Racine accuses Rotrou of duality of interest in his *Antigone*, saying that he has united in one play two different subjects, that of Euripides' *Phoenicians* and that of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Racine has limited himself to the study of the relationship between the twin brothers, resisting the temptation offered by other aspects of the story of the family of Oedipus.

Étéocle and Polynice should never have been born, and the fate on which Jocaste calls, or the avenging gods, or outraged nature, or the law of cause and effect, all alike decree that the evil must destroy itself. Before their birth they strove against each other. Étéocle says in the first scene of Act IV :

Nous étions ennemis dès la plus tendre enfance ;  
Que dis-je ? nous l'étions avant notre naissance.

On diroit que le ciel, par un arrêt funeste,  
Voulut de nos parents punir ainsi l'inceste ;  
Et que dans notre sang il voulut mettre au jour  
Tout ce qu'ont de plus noir et la haine et l'amour.

And their hatred is a poison in their blood ; they nauseate each other ; they cannot bear to stand face to face. For them the most ordinary words lose their common meaning and are perverted to a bitter individual sense. Jocaste in Scene 3 of Act IV, having finally attained her wish and brought her sons together, invokes the power of family affection :

Surtout que le sang parle et fasse son office.

Irony dogs her simplest word and there is no familiar sentiment

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of life on which Jocaste calls but it betrays her. She calls on the blood-tie to unite them and it is the common curse of their incestuous blood that drives them towards each other sword in hand. There is no memory on which she calls that is not laden with her tragedy :

Considérez ces lieux où vous prîtes naissance :  
Leur aspect sur vos cœurs n'a-t-il point de puissance ?  
C'est ici que tous deux vous reçûtes le jour ;

Oedipus is dead when the play begins but he could not dominate them more were he still on the throne. Never was the soul more surely handed on by the body than in this play. Jocaste ends her speech :

Ils ne connoissent plus la voix de la nature.

But they never knew it. At every step the voice of nature bids them track each other down and kill. Death appears to them in terms of vengeance and has no other significance. Jocaste in Scene 3 of Act IV, having pleaded in vain with her unnatural children, bids them fulfil their destiny :

Montrez en vous tuant comme vous êtes frères :  
Le plus grand des forfaits vous a donné le jour ;  
Il faut qu'un crime égal vous l'arrache à son tour.

That, in three lines, is the theme of Racine's first play. It has the symmetry and the simplicity characteristic of his tragedies. The dead and irremediable past is embodied in the present and nothing can alter the shape of the future ; the characters in Racine are doubly haunted : by the past that makes them what they are, and by the future crimes they know they cannot resist, being what they are. They see that they are beckoning catastrophe, yet they cannot do otherwise, they cannot deny their natures, clamouring for outlet.

Mr. A. F. B. Clark in his book on Racine<sup>1</sup> says : " There was nothing in *La Thébaïde* to suggest to its first audience

<sup>1</sup> *Jean Racine*. Harvard University Press, 1939.



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that its author was a man who would some day revolutionize the content of French tragedy. It bears the outer marks of being written by a disciple of Corneille. Its subject is the typical Cornelian one of great ambitions competing for a great political object, the winning of a throne." It is true that there is a political interest in all the plays of Racine. But it is not the main theme in *La Thébàïde*. Already in *La Thébàïde* Racine is treating great forces of the spirit, which possess the soul like demons and must be satisfied at the cost of life itself. Passionate hatred, rivalling the desire to dominate, and both increasing and being increased by it, works in the brothers until everything else is swallowed up by their blind enmity. Étéocle says :

J'eusse accepté le trône avec moins de plaisir,

when he sees an opportunity of killing his brother. And Poly-nice, having stabbed him to death, uses his empire for the further easing of his hatred :

"Et tu meurs, lui dit-il, et moi je vais régner,

Traître, songe en mourant que tu meurs mon sujet."

Mr. Clark fully appreciates the "ferocity" of the two brothers and calls it "one of the deepest and darkest elements in Racine's genius", and says that the play might bear as sub-title "The Song of Hate". These things are true of the play but they do not constitute its originality, nor that of Racine. In *La Thébàïde* the ferocity of the two brothers seems not only unnaturally great but inevitable, although the numerous deaths resulting from it do not. It is in this inevitability that the originality of Racine lies. He conceives and presents dramatically situations in which tragedy is inherent and hope is only a weapon of pain. Hémon fails to prevent the brothers from killing each other and possibly he might have been allowed to succeed for a time. But we do not get the sense of tragedy because the brothers kill each other but because we are made to realize that nothing else can give

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them so much pleasure. They were born to do it ; it is the great purpose of their lives. The end of the Racinian tragedy is always implicit in the beginning ; the action consists in the gradual unfolding of the circumstances which lead from one to the other. In *La Thébaïde* the fierce passion which causes everything and seems to leap forth dangerously as it will, is itself performing the perfect curve traced by an unswerving fatality. The originality of Racine lies in his presentation of the apparent liberty with which his characters bring about their inevitable fate.

## Alexandre le Grand

1665

RACINE intended *Alexandre* to be a magnificent compliment to Louis XIV: “. . . j'assemble tout ce que le siècle présent et les siècles passés nous peuvent fournir de plus grand”. Although there is an occasional flash of the great Corneille in the uncompromising spirit of Axiane and in Porus, the influence of Thomas Corneille and of Quinault is more evident. *Alexandre* is a well-composed play: “toutes mes scènes sont bien remplies . . . elles sont liées nécessairement les unes avec les autres . . . tous mes acteurs ne viennent point sur le théâtre, que l'on ne sache la raison qui les y fait venir, et . . . avec peu d'incidents et peu de matière, j'ai été assez heureux pour faire une pièce qui les [the spectators] a peut-être attachés malgré eux, depuis le commencement jusqu'à la fin”. It is not only well written but occasionally there is the strange Racinian ability to startle by conventional means. Yet on the whole it is a dull play. Love and war are competently fêted in the most fashionable language of the day. There is rarely the sense of anything truly felt. The passion that animates *La Thébaine* is absent. We are led to believe that much is at stake but it seldom concerns us. Love is but gallantry and preciosity — not the mark of a wayward and exacting mind but an assured following of the beaten track.

Alexandre is invading India and the princess Axiane is allied with the princes Porus and Taxile to resist him. Porus and Taxile are in love with Axiane, but Taxile's sister Cléofile loves

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Alexandre and persuades her brother to come to terms with him. The action takes place in Taxile's camp. Cléofile is a nimble arguer and Taxile values Axiane more than glory but realizes that he cannot win her without it. Cléofile describes with relish how strong and fortunate Alexandre is, but Taxile refuses to be a coward and a traitor. Cléofile considers it an honour to be singled out by Alexandre, but Taxile is doubtful :

Ai-je mérité seul son indigne pitié ?

Cléofile reassures and reproaches him :

On ne voit point d'esclave au rang de ses amis.  
Ah ! si son amitié peut souiller votre gloire,  
Que ne m'épargniez-vous une tache si noire ?

Taxile replies that she is free to love Alexandre but that the independence of others depends on his resistance and also the love of Axiane :

Mais comme vous, ma sœur, j'ai mon amour à suivre.  
Les beaux yeux d'Axiane, ennemis de la paix,  
Contre votre Alexandre arment tous leurs attraits.  
Reine de tous les cœurs, elle met tout en armes  
Pour cette liberté que détruisent ses charmes :  
Elle rougit des fers qu'on apporte en ces lieux,  
Et n'y sauroit souffrir de tyrans que ses yeux.  
Il faut servir, ma sœur, son illustre colère.

She keeps to the same key :

De ses tyrans si chers suivez l'arrêt fatal.

His prowess in battle will only add to the laurels of Porus, his ally in war and rival in love. He will be either

L'esclave de Porus ou l'ami d'Alexandre.

Porus enters, demanding an immediate attack on Alexandre. He feels that Alexandre is playing for time and has sent Éphestion to parley only for the sake of delay. He scorns Taxile's suggestion

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that Alexandre may mean to offer peace. Taxile protests that submission will be a mere formality :

Rendons-lui des devoirs qui ne nous coûtent rien.

Porus demands :

Compteraï-je pour rien la perte de ma gloire ?

and confesses, when Taxile praises peace, that he has long desired the opportunity of measuring himself against Alexandre. Racine exerted himself to answer the charge of having made Porus greater than Alexandre and admitted that " Porus a peut-être quelque chose qui intéresse davantage, parce qu'il est dans le malheur ". As Axiane enters Taxile withdraws, saying that he will leave these nobler souls to converse together. Porus is glad to have the opportunity of conquering alone ; Axiane desires to retain Taxile as an ally. She provokes a declaration of love from Porus and persuades him to see Éphestion.

In Act II Éphestion,

Fidèle confident du beau feu de mon maître,

comes to plead for Alexandre with Cléofile, whom Alexandre had taken captive, fallen in love with and set free. Alexandre desires Cléofile to persuade Taxile and Porus to accept the peace he is offering them. Cléofile protests that

Les charmes d'une reine et l'exemple d'un roi,  
Dès que je veux parler, s'élèvent contre moi.

In the next scene the offer is made to the two princes. They can choose

Si vous voulez tout perdre ou tenir tout de lui.

Taxile is ready to make terms, but Porus considers him a traitor and sends a challenge back to Alexandre :

Et ne sauroit-on vivre au bout de l'univers  
Sans connoître son nom et le poids de ses fers ?  
Quelle étrange valeur, qui ne cherchant qu'à nuire,  
Embrase tout, sitôt qu'elle commence à luire ;

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Qui n'a que son orgueil pour règle et pour raison ;  
Qui veut que l'univers ne soit qu'une prison,  
Et que maître absolu de tous tant que nous sommes,  
Ses esclaves en nombre égalent tous les hommes !

He intends to resist the tyrant alone. Ephestion warns him, but Porus is not dismayed by the fame of Alexandre :

Le fils de Jupiter passe ici pour un homme.

Alexandre cannot give him what he wants :

La gloire est le seul bien qui nous puisse tenter,  
Et le seul que mon cœur cherche à lui disputer ;

Ephestion returns :

Et c'est aussi ce que cherche Alexandre.

Racine imagines a great part of the world divided between two proud young men who do not want it except as a symbol of supremacy. Porus feels that Taxile is small loss, but Axiane endeavours to win him back and is given a prevaricating reply. After much urging Axiane delicately hints at her love for Porus and he takes leave of her to deserve it.

Act III opens with an argument between Axiane and Cléofile. Axiane, detained in Taxile's camp, complains that he is imprisoning her person since he has failed to capture her heart. Cléofile replies that she is merely being protected. Cléofile tries to taunt her, at first without success :

le soin qui vous travaille  
Vous le feroit chercher jusqu'au champ de bataille.

Axiane replies :

Je ferois plus, Madame : un mouvement si beau  
Mè le feroit chercher jusque dans le tombeau,  
Perdre tous mes États, et voir d'un œil tranquille  
Alexandre en payer le cœur de Cléofile.

The dialogue carries emotion as well as the various points of view. Cléofile tells her, since she loves Porus so, to await

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him here ; perhaps Alexandre will bring him back. Axiane is stirred :

Et vous croyez trop tôt ce que vous souhaitez.

Oui, oui. . . .

Taxile returns to announce that Porus has been defeated after a gallant resistance. Axiane rebukes him fiercely, expressing her love and hate with a trace of Hermione's venom. But she is not made to love and hate the same person, like Hermione, or almost at the same moment, like Roxane. She scornfully refuses Taxile's assurance that Alexandre will not dethrone her :

Et sur mon propre trône on me verroit placée

Par le même tyran qui m'en auroit chassée ?

. . . . .

Non, non, je ne sais point vendre mon amitié,

Caresser un tyran, et régner par pitié.

Taxile gives Cléofile an account of Alexandre before he appears. Although the play is filled with praise of Alexandre and he is the victor, it is only by report that he is great, and in the play Porus outshines him. Alexandre is shown to be mild and generous and very gallant in his love for Cléofile. He admires Porus and sends Ephestion in search of him.

In Act IV Axiane determines to follow the example of Porus and die nobly. Alexandre comes to appeal to her on Taxile's behalf as he has promised Cléofile. In spite of provocation from Axiane he remains admirably kind, but she likes him the less for it :

Non, Seigneur : je vous hais d'autant plus qu'on vous aime,

D'autant plus qu'il me faut vous admirer moi-même,

Que l'univers entier m'en impose la loi,

Et que personne enfin ne vous hait avec moi.

She tells Taxile that he can win her esteem only by conquering or dying. When he threatens her she answers contemptuously. Taxile regrets having followed Cléofile's advice :

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Je la verrois, sans vous, par mes soins défendue,  
Entre Porus et moi demeurer suspendue ;  
Et ne seroit-ce pas un bonheur trop charmant  
Que de l'avoir réduite à douter un moment ?

At last he asserts himself and matches the recklessness of Porus :

Il faut que tout périsse, ou que je sois heureux.

Then he learns from Cléofile that Porus is not only alive but taking full advantage of the lull caused by the rumour of his death. Taxile rushes out to seek Porus and Act IV ends with a heightening of such tension as there is in the play.

In the last act Alexandre is convinced that he has won a splendid victory. Cléofile, however, feels that Porus is still to be reckoned with as well as her disappointed brother. Alexandre promises her

Encore une victoire, et je reviens, Madame,  
Borner toute ma gloire à régner sur votre âme.

Axiane complains that Taxile is keeping her a prisoner in the camp while Porus perhaps is risking his life to come to her aid. Alexandre replies that she must appeal to Taxile on Porus's behalf. Axiane refuses indignantly. Alexandre repeats his terms when Porus appears :

Vivez ; mais consentez au bonheur de Taxile.

Porus announces the death of Taxile and is borne out by Ephestion, who gives a lively account of the battle between the two rivals. Cléofile weeps for her brother and demands vengeance. It is Axiane who replies, angry and very eloquent as she sarcastically repeats Cléofile's request. Porus bids Alexandre kill him and

Va vaincre en sûreté le reste de la terre.

Alexandre, not to be outdone in nobility, restores Axiane and the kingdom to Porus and apologizes to Cléofile :

Souffrez que, jusqu'au bout achevant ma carrière,  
J'apporte à vos beaux yeux ma vertu tout entière.



## A NEW VIEW OF THE PLAYS OF RACINE

Axiane and Porus make graceful acknowledgments. Cléofile is disconsolate ; as Axiane said :

Elle en a fait un lâche, et ne l'a pu sauver.

Alexandre promises that Taxile shall have "un tombeau superbe", and his sad fate seems unimportant in the prevailing satisfaction.

Nothing could seem more natural to Louis XIV than a resemblance between Alexander the Great and himself. But Racine has made the great conqueror bear a more distinct resemblance to one of Louis's courtiers than to Louis. Racine's hero is not convincingly concerned with anything but gallantry. He is as accomplished in the art of making noble gestures as a Cornelian hero, but in the best plays of Corneille the issues involved have far greater reality than those in *Alexandre*. Preciosity in the later plays of Racine has often a dramatic significance. Here it is merely a social convention that often appears tedious. The death of Taxile, who was interesting for a moment, does not provide a tragic ending and fails even to seem important. *Alexandre* is no more tragic than *Les Plaideurs*, Racine's comedy.

## Andromaque

1667

IN *Andromaque*, Racine's first great play, the characters are less renowned than their parents or than the dead on whom they call, and the familiar destinies stand like shadows behind the people in the play who still hold their lives in their hands and feel their way anew in the old path of life and forfeit it before our eyes. Not the fabulously beautiful Helen whom Paris bore away to Troy but her jealous daughter Hermione, and not the leaders of the Greeks, Agamemnon and Menelaus, but Agamemnon's son Orestes, made famous by his misery, and finally Pyrrhus, the splendid son of Achilles, are chosen by Racine.

The Trojan War is ended and among the captive women is Andromache, the widow of Hector, who is allotted to Pyrrhus, King of Epirus. Hector, son of Priam, King of Troy, was the greatest of the Trojans, and Achilles slew him and dragged him in the dust after his chariot, and Achilles' son Pyrrhus killed Hector's father Priam and Priam's daughter Polyxena. In Euripides' play Andromache has borne Pyrrhus a son whom she loves as she had loved Astyanax, the son she bore to Hector, and it is Hermione who wishes to kill the child of Pyrrhus and Andromache, her unwilling rival. [But in Racine's play Pyrrhus so loves Andromaque and she Hector that he cannot use his power, and throughout the play finds himself begging her to spare him the necessity of doing so.] A little like Mithridate with Monime, he wants her to accept his love and resents the necessity of forcing it upon her. And she holds him at bay, like Monime,

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by full acknowledgment of his power and sets the great deeds that exalted him at her expense between them.) In Racine's play *Astyanax* has been preserved and *Pyrrhus* threatens to make the child suffer for the mother's refusal to marry him. If he does this he loses his only influence over her and he hesitates to carry out the threat. But when he thinks that he has at last forced the marriage upon her, he is not content to have profited by her fear and still aspires to win her gratitude.

When the play begins Oreste, who loved *Hermione* before her betrothal to *Pyrrhus* and loves her still, has come as an ambassador from the Greeks to demand that *Astyanax* be handed over to them and that the marriage of *Pyrrhus* and *Hermione*, daughter of *Menelaus*, be no longer delayed. To greet his friend *Pylade*, Oreste can even bring himself to doubt the harshness of his execrated fate. The situation and the characters of the speakers are at once revealed in an easy natural exchange of observations. The two whose names symbolize friendship have been parted for over six months and have reason to give an account of themselves. *Pylade* has feared for the life of Oreste who had set out to seek his end, but now he is reassured by the stately retinue of the ambassador and trusts that Oreste has overcome his melancholy. But Oreste heavily disclaims all knowledge of his own future :

Hélas ! qui peut savoir le destin qui m'amène ?

He has come for love of *Hermione*, although, as *Pylade* tells him, she is not likely to welcome him in *Epirus* when she rejected him in *Sparta*. He had believed Oreste cured of love and Oreste had shared this belief. At first, when *Menelaus* bestowed his daughter on *Pyrrhus*, Oreste had embarked on interminable grief and paints his long abandonment in an interminable line :

Trâner de mers en mers ma chaîne et mes ennuis.

With his usual unmannerliness of soul he had tried to console

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himself by disparaging what he loved and had returned from his wanderings in a "calme trompeur" which was, however, sufficiently incomplete to leave him hoping that with the help of war and fame,

L'amour achèveroit de sortir de mon cœur.

But he returns to find Greece alarmed at the news that Pyrrhus is nurturing their Trojan enemy, Astyanax. The child whom Euripides replaces in Andromaque's affections by Molossus, son of Pyrrhus and Andromaque, has been saved in Racine's play by a device that recalls the early age, when a point of view that is still dying hard evoked no comment. In calmly flowing verse Oreste explains how Andromaque saved her child's life at the expense of another's, and what seems most remarkable is that she succeeded in deceiving the wily Ulysses in the process.

But what rejoices Oreste is the rumour that Hermione is being neglected by Pyrrhus, and Oreste tries in vain to persuade himself that it is only because he hates her that he is glad to know her treated as she had treated him. His hatred of her and his desire for her merge, and throughout the play Oreste's love and hate are inextricably mingled. It is Pylade who evokes whatever capacity of devotion remains in Oreste. He is as unscrupulous towards his country as he is towards Hermione, and having exerted himself to be chosen as ambassador with every intention of betraying his trust, he accepts the dictates of his own emotions as a superior force which he can only become aware of and obey. He has tried to forget in vain and so :

Je me livre en aveugle au destin qui m'entraîne.  
J'aime : je viens chercher Hermione en ces lieux,  
La fléchir, l'enlever, ou mourir à ses yeux.

Pylade sketches for him the situation with which he will have to deal. Pyrrhus loves "cette veuve inhumaine" who persists in remaining faithful to Hector, and Hermione loves Pyrrhus in spite of his indifference. Three of the four main characters love

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someone whose affection is engaged elsewhere, and the symmetry of the situation in this play has sometimes been found obtrusive — Racine's arrangements are too noticeably perfect, they become unreal. Oreste loves Hermione who loves Pyrrhus who loves Andromaque who loves Hector who is dead; is it not reminiscent of the chain of lovers in pastoral drama? Certainly the situation between Oreste and Hermione is paralleled by the situation between Pyrrhus and Andromaque, but what it is important to notice is the isolation of each of them in the individual condition and their inability to relate it to the general lot in spite of the strikingly similar situation of the other protagonists. Their experience is taken from the common stock, but only those not sharing it have leisure to realize this to the full and find the pattern monotonous. This is the most impressive and the most realistic factor in the play. The most surprising element of life is most vividly portrayed in Racine's first good play. The self-absorption, the imperviousness to the similarity between oneself and other people, one's own desire and theirs, is almost aggressively stated in a similarity of situation which the characters would find irrelevant in the midst of their passion, if they noticed it.

Pylade describes Pyrrhus at the feet of Hermione sighing "moins d'amour que de rage" capable of marrying her in despair and of taking his revenge on Andromaque, whilst Hermione, knowing that he does not love her, cannot give him up, decides to go, yet waits and sometimes thinks of Oreste. Pylade advises Oreste to win Hermione by uniting Andromaque and Pyrrhus.

The second scene of the play introduces Pyrrhus who carelessly but adequately dismisses every point Oreste makes in utter insincerity. Having congratulated himself on beholding the son of Achilles, Oreste is informed that the name of Agamemnon's son had prepared Pyrrhus for a less paltry matter than the fate of a child. By what right, asks Pyrrhus, do they demand

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his share of the spoil ? And why now, after a year's delay, if the danger of Troy in ashes seemed to them so great ? Besides, he cannot kill the child now, without the flaming darkness and the victory to urge him on :

La victoire et la nuit, plus cruelles que nous,  
Nous excitoient au meurtre, et confondoient nos coups.  
Mon courroux aux vaincus ne fut que trop sévère.  
Mais que ma cruauté survive à ma colère ?

It seems to him, later, that Andromaque should understand this and hold him innocent. Oreste is not interested in the explanation of Pyrrhus's conduct ; let him refuse, no matter why, so that Andromaque and her son's protector may be united, and Hermione in despair accept Oreste. By a definite challenge he provokes Pyrrhus to a definite refusal. Oreste then suggests that affection for Hermione will prevent a conflict with her father, but Pyrrhus will not commit himself and contemptuously gives Oreste permission to see " la fille d'Hélène " before his departure. Rebuked for this by Phoenix, his " gouverneur ", as soon as they are alone and reminded that Oreste loves Hermione and may win her love in return, Pyrrhus promptly replies that nothing would give him more pleasure than that they should sail away together and leave him in peace. Then he brushes aside the whole argument, for

Andromaque paroît.

Eagerly he greets her with his fatuous inquiry :

Me cherchiez-vous, Madame ?

Un espoir si charmant me seroit-il permis ?

She replies, with a subtle reproach in every line, that she is going to the place where her son is kept, since he allows her to see once a day all that remains to her of Hector and of Troy. She has not yet embraced her child to-day. When Pyrrhus tells of the new peril threatening Astyanax, Andromaque cries out quite spontaneously :

Et vous prononcerez un arrêt si cruel ?

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then modifies her cry and appeals to him again and again, each time more directly until at last her grief is a personal issue between the two of them, Pyrrhus and Andromaque, not Greece and Troy :

Est-ce mon intérêt qui le rend criminel ?  
Hélas ! on ne craint point qu'il venge un jour son père ;  
On craint qu'il n'essuyât les larmes de sa mère.  
Il m'auroit tenu lieu d'un père et d'un époux ;  
Mais il me faut tout perdre, et toujours par vos coups.

Pyrrhus, with a show of heroism that contrasts strangely with his flippant treatment of Oreste, promises to brave the greatest perils for her sake, then, making the transition with disconcerting abruptness, asks :

Me refuserez-vous un regard moins sévère ?

The clumsy gallantry of Pyrrhus has been much criticized, and with justice. It is clumsy. He is a bear dancing, he is ridiculous but also formidable, and the interest of the spectacle lies in the fact that his formidable strength is being held in leash, to his own great amazement.

Andromaque, who had placed her misfortune between them like a barrier that he might be stirred to remove it, now hastens to interpose it again. He shall help her, an enemy and a captive, without hope of reward, from sheer nobility of heart. Pyrrhus, in reply, shows, here at their first meeting on the stage, that he is incapable of understanding her nature, which is so different from his own. Andromaque understands Pyrrhus but she does not forgive him, for her hostility is not based on his motives but on their outcome. The coarseness, the "insensibility" of Pyrrhus is never more clearly shown than in the speech beginning "Hé quoi ? votre courroux . . ." He sees the war only from his own point of view, and with an intolerable playfulness compares her sufferings with his own. He had made war. What of it :

J'ai fait des malheureux, sans doute. . . .

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Now that it is over and he is able to forget, how can she remember and still hate him and make him suffer ?

Brûlé de plus de feux que je n'en allumai.

He dares and is foolish enough to offer himself as a second father to Astyanax whom Andromaque loves not only instinctively as Euripides' Andromaque loves Molossus, with the love of a mother for any child of hers, but with a sentimental love as well because he is Hector's son. It is an extension of her love for Hector. Pyrrhus thinks it as easy to restore as to destroy. He offers to rebuild Troy, to crown her son as king, but Andromaque does not value the buildings or the glory for themselves :

Sacrés murs, que n'a pu conserver mon Hector.

It was Hector's right, not Pyrrhus's gift, that she desired for her son, and not thinking what it would be wise to say, she ends bitterly :

Retournez, retournez à la fille d'Hélène.

Still Pyrrhus can reply :

Et le puis-je, Madame ? Ah ! que vous me gênez !  
Comment lui rendre un cœur que vous me retenez ?

Her emotions appear to him only as obstacles to his will. He reminds her that he is loved by Hermione, and, exasperated, Andromaque again evokes the past and gives supreme expression to her love and pride and sorrow in the lines

Sa mort seule a rendu votre père immortel.  
Il doit au sang d'Hector tout l'éclat de ses armes,  
Et vous n'êtes tous deux connus que par mes larmes.

Pyrrhus now roughly bids her choose between his love and hate ; his passion cannot sink to mere indifference. If she refuses him, her son shall be handed over to the Greeks. Then I, Andromaque answers, having followed him to the grave, shall see Hector once again :

Ainsi tous trois, Seigneur, par vos soins réunis. . . .



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Pyrrhus cuts short her infuriating words and bids her go to her son and remember his peril when she embraces him.

The first appearance of Hermione has been reserved for Act II. Oreste had inquired keenly of Pylade how Hermione received the slight Pyrrhus put upon her and he had replied that she ignored it as long as she could. Hermione is seen here shrinking from the thought of Oreste's malicious glee at her plight. Cléone, her confidante, tries to reassure her, but it is Hermione who is right. Like Pyrrhus, Hermione feels that her rejected love must turn to hate, yet she cannot leave Epirus, although her father has ordered her to do so unless Pyrrhus fulfils his obligations without further delay. Hermione has all the sorer grudge against Pyrrhus because in accepting him at her father's hand she had made no secret of her love :

Si je le hais, Cléone ! Il y va de ma gloire,  
Après tant de bontés dont il perd la mémoire.  
Lui qui me fut si cher, et qui m'a pu trahir !  
Ah ! je l'ai trop aimé pour ne le point hair.

Hermione has a fierce pride that struggles in vain against her love. Is she, then, waiting for a greater insult ? asks Cléone. Hermione exclaims in pain and admits that she cannot bear to confess the truth to herself. Let Cléone believe nothing of what she has just heard her say, let her persuade Hermione that she did not mean what she said. Then Hermione tries to come to terms with herself, and, firmly determined to stay in any case, offers to go, and discovers a purpose that will console her pride when she remains. She may be leaving just when he is about to return to her, she thinks. Hope tricks her from point to point before she breaks almost free from it ; perhaps not only duty will send him back to her :

Fuyons. . . . Mais si l'ingrat rentroit dans son devoir !  
Si la foi dans son cœur retrouvoit quelque place !  
S'il venoit à mes pieds me demander sa grâce !  
Si sous mes lois, Amour, tu pouvois l'engager !

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S'il vouloit ! . . . Mais l'ingrat ne veut que m'outrager.  
Demeurons toutefois pour troubler leur fortune ;  
Prenons quelque plaisir à leur être importune.

She is shamelessly vindictive. It was she who roused Menelaus to demand Astyanax. She will now imperil his mother and Pyrrhus too. She is by nature vain, petty and vindictive, but her vindictiveness here is a trick of the mind to elude her reason and the wound it would inflict on her notion of herself ; what is now called the unconscious plays a considerable role in the dramatic effect obtained by Racine. At the end of the play, when Pyrrhus is dead and hope has gone, Hermione does not think of Andromaque or of revenge.

When Cléone points out Andromaque's innocence, Hermione answers only by excusing herself for the warmth she had shown Pyrrhus on his glorious return from Troy and at last brings herself to send for Oreste. When he is announced she is dismayed at having to see him so soon, but nevertheless is capable of greeting him with the most accomplished affectation. Oreste, who epitomizes his own weakness of character in a few words,

et le destin d'Oreste

Est de venir sans cesse adorer vos attraits,  
Et de jurer toujours qu'il n'y viendra jamais,

replies with one of the most sustained efforts of preciousness to be found in Racine. Hermione, who after all is not an ambassador, reserves to herself the right of being affected and chides Oreste for his extravagant expressions :

Que parlez-vous du Scythe et de mes cruautés ?  
Songez à tous ces rois que vous représentez.

When Oreste tells her the result of his mission and that he is waiting only to hear her speak the refusal of which he is already sure, she reproaches him and gives him false hope. Oreste is abjectly happy and she is called "divine princess" for her pains. But Hermione, having made the effort of reconquering

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him, allows her thoughts to wander and absent-mindedly continues :

Vous que j'ai plaint, enfin que je voudrois aimer.

Oreste has been listening avidly and does not fail to realize the significance of the true statement she had involuntarily made.

Je vous entends. Tel est mon partage funeste :

Le cœur est pour Pyrrhus, et les vœux pour Oreste.

If he were Pyrrhus,

Vous m'aimeriez, Madame, en me voulant haïr.

His fine analysis of her mood leads to his undoing, for in telling her what she feels he forgets how his words must be affecting those feelings and actually says :

Car enfin il vous hait ; son âme ailleurs éprise

N'a plus. . . .

She challenges this but Oreste will not retract, and Hermione, almost pathetically defiant, bids him arm Greece against Pyrrhus and ends childishly :

Allez. Après cela direz-vous que je l'aime ?

Oreste invites her to accompany him, and Hermione, naturally candid and most unskilful in deceit, again betrays herself :

Mais, Seigneur, cependant s'il épouse Andromaque ?

Oreste is almost speechless :

Hé ! Madame,

and Hermione hurriedly proffers a pitiful explanation which he ignores. He does not spare her and she might well be disconcerted by his acuteness. But Oreste is unable to profit by any powers of mind he has. Hermione is not disconcerted by his observation of her love :

Et vous le haïssez ? Avouez-le, Madame,

L'amour n'est pas un feu qu'on renferme en une âme :

Tout nous trahit, la voix, le silence, les yeux ;

Et les feux mal couverts n'en éclatent que mieux.

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It is not his object to talk wisely of love or to prove her a liar but to reconcile her to his love. She replies with blatant insincerity and sends him to Pyrrhus with an ultimatum. If Pyrrhus chooses Andromaque then Hermione will agree to accompany Oreste, and Oreste is left complacently sure that the whole issue depends on him ; he has only to speak to Pyrrhus. His self-congratulation is cut short by the entry of Pyrrhus, newly angered by Andromaque and ready to talk of surrendering her son. Oreste sneeringly congratulates him on the decision :

Seigneur, par ce conseil prudent et rigoureux,  
C'est acheter la paix du sang d'un malheureux.

Pyrrhus makes a curt acknowledgment and counter-thrusts :

Oui. Mais je veux, Seigneur, l'assurer davantage :  
D'une éternelle paix Hermione est le gage ;  
Je l'épouse. Il sembloit qu'un spectacle si doux  
N'attendît en ces lieux qu'un témoin tel que vous.  
Vous y représentez tous les Grecs et son père,  
J'attends, avec la paix, son cœur de votre main.

Pyrrhus has agreed to marry Hermione in much the same spirit as she had agreed to accompany Oreste. He had enjoyed the thought of waging war for Andromaque but she had antagonized him by answering only with the name of Hector :

Cent fois le nom d'Hector est sorti de sa bouche.  
Vainement à son fils j'assurois mon secours :  
" C'est Hector, disoit-elle en l'embrassant toujours ;  
Voilà ses yeux, sa bouche, et déjà son audace ;  
C'est lui-même, c'est toi, cher époux, que j'embrasse."  
Et quelle est sa pensée ? Attend-elle en ce jour  
Que jé lui laisse un fils pour nourrir son amour ?

As Hermione thought only of Pyrrhus when discussing flight with Oreste, so he thinks only of Andromaque in contemplating marriage with Hermione. Like Hermione he reminds himself of all the reasons for hating his beloved and, revealing his love

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when he thinks it overcome, he says that it is her beauty that emboldens her to anger him. Phoenix unintentionally causes a broader smile at Pyrrhus's expense by the sound advice,

Commencez donc, Seigneur, à ne m'en parler plus,  
and urges him to go himself to Hermione instead of sending a rival. Pyrrhus thinks of Hermione only in relation to Andromaque and asks :

Crois-tu, si je l'épouse,  
Qu'Andromaque en son cœur n'en sera pas jalouse ?

Then he finds a most fatuous reason for seeing Andromaque again. He must see her again to express his enmity more fully than he has done as yet. Phoenix tells him to go then and kneel at her feet in homage, and Pyrrhus breaks into protest and finds himself back again at the same point, in danger of succumbing. With magnificent simplicity Pyrrhus declaims :

Je lui donne son fils, mon âme, mon empire ;  
Et je ne puis gagner dans son perfide cœur  
D'autre rang que celui de son persécuteur ?

He decides to punish her, then thinks :

Elle en mourra, Phoenix, et j'en serai la cause.

All this he describes as

D'un amour qui s'éteint c'est le dernier éclat,  
and promises to be guided by Phoenix.

Act III opens with the weak despair of Oreste at the sudden change of mind in Pyrrhus. He must have his way ; he repeats :

Le dessein en est pris, je le veux achever.  
Oui, je le veux.

And Pylade reassuringly concurs, says anything to make him calm. It is in this scene that the sense of tragic agony of mind ascends from the stage, and there is, for the first time, nothing comic in the spectacle of love unrequited. Andromaque's grief

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was real enough but Pyrrhus's helplessness before it gave an almost humorous effect. The struggle between Hermione's love and pride and their rivalry for her attention in the conversation with Oreste, as well as Oreste's complacency and Pyrrhus's bewildered discovery of his own feelings, aroused an almost amused interest. But the spectacle of Oreste in the grip of a destructive power that seems to transcend and use his love for its own ends does not amuse but appals, and Pylade's common sense does not counteract the effect of Oreste's state but serves only to show how lost beyond all hope he is ; for Hermione and Pyrrhus know themselves, no matter how unwillingly, but Oreste is imprisoned in his emotions and can relate them to reality only in the case of Pylade. He alone in the play does not try sincerely to use his reason and he alone in all the plays of Racine loses it. He is not Orestes the matricide whom furies pursue, but the vacillating, self-indulgent son of a weak but glorious father, and he breeds his own furies in the feverish assumption of a power that is not his to exercise, and collapses at the end of the play when he can no longer take refuge from his own limitations, and lets the ghosts of his dead intentions crowd over his disabled mind.

Oreste does not know what he hoped from an angry interview with Hermione :

Que sais-je ? De moi-même étois-je alors le maître ?

Perhaps he went to threaten them, though with what ? Pylade cannot even learn the result of his storming : Oreste only asks :

Et quelle âme, dis-moi, ne seroit éperdue . . .

His frenzy arose naturally but it is unnaturally prolonged. Pylade points out that Pyrrhus is acting against his desire, but instead of hoping to profit by this, Oreste wildly storms :

Non, non. . . .

Le cruel ne la prend que pour me l'arracher.

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Pyrrhus is sacrificing his own happiness for the sake of spiting Oreste, taking her from him at the very moment when she was about to turn to Oreste.

*Vous le croyez,*

replies Pylade, hoping to console him with the fact that he had not gained anything to lose. He understands Hermione perfectly, tells Oreste that if Pyrrhus does not marry Hermione now it is Oreste whom she will hate the more for it, at which Oreste insanely cries :

*C'est pour cela que je veux l'enlever.*

There is nothing to be hoped from love for Oreste. Pyrrhus, although he pursues Andromaque, does so with as much pity as he is capable of and hates the thought of her suffering, but Oreste declares that Hermione shall not be happy at his expense, that if he is to suffer she shall be forced to do likewise and shall learn to fear him. Pitifully weak, he desires to threaten and to be feared :

*C'est trop gémir tout seul. Je suis las qu'on me plaigne :  
Je prétends qu'à mon tour l'inhumaine me craigne,  
Et que ses yeux cruels, à pleurer condamnés,  
Me rendent tous les noms que je leur ai donnés.*

Pylade tries to appeal to Oreste's pride : " Oreste ravisseur ! " but in vain. Then Oreste, who seems to have the least possible justification for doing so, indicts the gods and holds the world order responsible for his actions. He does not mention Clytemnaestra ; his only misfortune seems to be the loss of Hermione, whom he desires as a prey.

*Mon innocence enfin commence à me peser.  
Je ne sais de tout temps quelle injuste puissance  
Laisse le crime en paix et poursuit l'innocence. .  
De quelque part sur moi que je tourne les yeux,  
Je ne vois que malheurs qui condamnent les Dieux.  
Méritons leur courroux, justifions leur haine,  
Et que le fruit du crime en précède la peine.*

Oreste speaks of himself as if he were, like the Greek Orestes,

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one of the great victims of fate, as Phèdre and Athalie are. But he is merely one whom life does not favour and his tragedy is that he cannot accept his own mediocrity of nature and fortune but shakes his fist at them until he falls exhausted. He feels that he does not get his deserts which he identifies with his desires, so he perversely decides to earn his misfortune. He is one of the doomed to whom life is intolerable ; he resents his mediocre fate, defies it, and is yet alone in wallowing in his misery until it submerges him. He desires Hermione, but also to be avenged on life and publish its malevolence. The other victims desire a goal which may involve their death, but he is hungry for his end. He is grandiloquent but not absurd. He cannot bear his terrible littleness in the great line of which he comes, and Pylade, for whom Oreste has still affectionate concern, ceases to argue with him and offers his services :

Que ne peut l'amitié conduite par l'amour ?

It is excessively polite of him to say so, but his polite banalities bring Oreste down to earth and draw his attention from the hostile gods to the consideration of winds and ships and the safest way from the palace to the sea. And Oreste is reminded of the conventions of the life he detests and answers sedately :

J'abuse, cher ami, de ton trop d'amitié,

although he still feels an outcast :

Que tout le monde hait, et qui se hait lui-même.

In Scene 2 of Act III both Oreste and Hermione are in the most painful position and each tries to take advantage of the other's difficulty. Oreste greets her with the gibe :

Hé bien ! mes soins vous ont rendu votre conquête.

She retaliates by implying that that was precisely what might have been expected of him :

On le dit ; et de plus on vient de m'assurer

Que vous ne me cherchiez que pour m'y préparer.



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Since she ignores the question of Pyrrhus's feelings he asks her directly about her own, and it is now that she consents to mention Pyrrhus and tentatively speaks of the cause of his return to her. She would like to believe that he has tardily realized his love for her but she professes to accept the more probable explanation that his reasons are political ; it is Oreste who really loved her. Oreste chooses the more flattering explanation but will not let her evade his question and Hermione primly lies :

*L'amour ne règle pas le sort d'une princesse.*

Nevertheless, for his sake she had been willing to take flight. Her persistent hypocrisy almost overcomes Oreste's restraint but he manages to contain himself after a moment. Pylade could not speak more wisely than Oreste now :

*Chacun peut à son choix disposer de son âme.*

*La vôtre étoit à vous. J'espérois ; mais enfin*

*Vous l'avez pu donner sans me faire un larcin.*

Nothing could be more impartial and nothing more revealing of Oreste's state of mind than his unawareness of the truth of his own words. His least insincere line is :

*Je vous accuse aussi bien moins que la fortune.*

Hermione is surprised at Oreste's quiet acceptance of his fate but gives little thought to it. She wants to dwell on her happiness and convince herself of its reality. It is not to Oreste that she owes the return of Pyrrhus : " s'il m'épouse, il m'aime ", and why should she think of Oreste when there is Pyrrhus :

*Sais-tu quel est Pyrrhus ? T'es-tu fait raconter*

*Le nombre des exploits. . . . Mais qui les peut compter ?*

She is enumerating his qualities, finding him even " fidèle enfin ", when they are interrupted by Andromaque. Hermione tries in vain to escape.

Everything Andromaque says increases the resentment of Hermione as steadily as if it were calculated to that end, yet Andromaque's only purpose is to plead for her son. It is a

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beautiful moving prayer and Andromaque humbles herself to make it to Hermione, who feels not pity but mortification at every word :

Où fuyez-vous, Madame ?

N'est-ce point à vos yeux un spectacle assez doux  
Que la veuve d'Hector pleurante à vos genoux ?  
Je ne viens point ici, par de jalouses larmes,  
Vous envier un cœur qui se rend à vos charmes.  
Par une main cruelle, hélas ! j'ai vu percer  
Le seul où mes regards prétendoient s'adresser.  
Ma flamme par Hector fut jadis allumée ;  
Avec lui dans la tombe elle s'est enfermée.  
Mais il me reste un fils. Vous saurez quelque jour,  
Madame, pour un fils jusqu'où va notre amour ;  
Mais vous ne saurez pas, du moins je le souhaite,  
En quel trouble mortel son intérêt nous jette,  
Lorsque de tant de biens qui pouvoient nous flatter,  
C'est le seul qui nous reste, et qu'on veut nous l'ôter.  
Hélas ! lorsque lassés de dix ans de misère,  
Les Troyens en courroux menaçoient votre mère,  
J'ai su de mon Hector lui procurer l'appui.

Hermione would take flight and is detained against her will. She has been trying to minimize the importance of Andromaque and persuade herself of her own power, and she must hear Andromaque's appeal, made in deep humiliation without humility, for Andromaque is proud, as Hermione would like to be. She has been unfortunate but Hermione has been slighted. Andromaque is greatness kneeling, and Hermione would crush her out of existence. Andromaque tries to appease Hermione, but Hermione does not thrill to see Hector's widow at her feet ; she sees a captive who has won the love of Pyrrhus and does not want it, who claims to be moved by a love greater than Hermione has known as yet. Andromaque pleads that she had done a kindness to Hermione's mother, but Hermione is jealous of Helen who wins everyone's devotion. She is not sure when Andromaque says,

Vous pouvez sur Pyrrhus ce que j'ai pu sur lui,

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that it is true. It is sometimes said that the turning-point of the play is here, that Hermione throws away her advantage by refusing Andromaque's request and allowing her to encounter Pyrrhus again. The particular form of the decision may be attributed to Hermione, but a combination of circumstances most clearly personified to Oreste as a fate that he hates more actively than he loves Hermione—in this unlike other Racinian characters, whose nature it is to be more intent on the part of life desired than on the fate which denies it—makes a tragic outcome inevitable. This combination of circumstances is reflected in little in the scene between Andromaque and Hermione, as at every stage of the action, until it draws them step by step to their appointed end. Andromaque cannot be expected to say anything but what she has said, but Hermione, undisciplined and naturally jealous, feels nothing more than pain and spite, and sends her back to Pyrrhus, who is unlikely, in any case, while Andromaque lives, to allow anyone else to plead for her, and if she dies, to forgive Hermione for living. Hermione is vindictive and untruthful, for it is she—not, as she says, her father—who is responsible for Astyanax's plight, and Andromaque's last words, which should have been so disarming, must remind her of it sharply, and of her reasons. Andromaque has done all in her power and, unaware of the repeated wounds she has inflicted on Hermione, exclaims at the cruelty and scorn with which Hermione has answered her.

Scene 6 of Act III has elements of comedy. Pyrrhus enters, pretending to look for Hermione, and encouraged by Phoenix to do so, in fact. Andromaque fears to approach him in spite of Céphise's advice, and Pyrrhus mistakes her reluctance for disdain. Finally Pyrrhus wrings another plea from her by saying loudly to Phoenix :

Allons aux Grecs livrer le fils d'Hector.

He cannot withstand what has been called the "déchirante coquetterie" of Andromaque who brings herself to refer deli-

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cately to his love — can she no longer “ au moins toucher votre pitié ”, and painfully reminds him :

Vous qui braviez pour moi tant de périls divers !

Pyrrhus complains that she had not consented to ask what she wanted of him and brushes aside her excuse that it is hard for her to feel importunate. Jealousy makes him subtle and he declares that she cannot bear to owe him anything, would love her son the less if his life had been saved by Pyrrhus :

Si je l'avois sauvé, vous l'en aimeriez moins.

Andromaque's last plea, which it seems wrong that she should have to make, and which it should shame Pyrrhus to hear, makes him woo her again. Wearily she has to drag her sorrow out once more ; she has to say the bitter things that he has heard so often, and she does so as if it takes all her endurance to speak at all, with a brevity and calm that contrast with the passionate memory she will show to Céphise.

Seigneur, voyez l'état où vous me réduisez.  
J'ai vu mon père mort, et nos murs embrasés ;  
J'ai vu trancher les jours de ma famille entière,  
Et mon époux sanglant traîné sur la poussière,  
Son fils seul avec moi, réservé pour les fers.

She makes herself flatter him ; at last she reproaches him and she pleads again. Only now Pyrrhus gives way. He dismisses Phoenix, not wishing to capitulate before him, and in his turn pleads for mercy. He begs her at least to look at him. He is alternatively tyrannical and submissive, but unlike Oreste he sees himself and the situation clearly, and, in spite of his confusion of feeling, bids her choose : “ il faut ou périr ou régner ”.

Céphise finds matter for congratulation in Pyrrhus's ultimatum. Andromaque sees no choice. Her son must die. Céphise considers that Hector would not be dishonoured in such a successor as Pyrrhus, victorious and ready to forget his conquests. Andromaque's “ Dois-je les oublier ? ” should not be

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taken to mean that she remembers Hector and resents the love of Pyrrhus from duty. The whole rhythm of her reply shows that she has been unable to forget what Pyrrhus did, she remembers its horror down to the colour and the sound that accompanied it ; she defends herself by arguing that it is not her duty to marry him, but she proves that she would find it intolerable to do so when she says :

Songe, songe, Céphise, à cette nuit cruelle  
Qui fut pour tout un peuple une nuit éternelle.  
Figure-toi Pyrrhus, les yeux étincelants,  
Entrant à la lueur de nos palais brûlants,  
Sur tous mes frères morts se faisant un passage,  
Et de sang tout couvert échauffant le carnage.  
Songe aux cris des vainqueurs, songe aux cris des mourants,  
Dans la flamme étouffés, sous le fer expirants.  
Peins-toi dans ces horreurs Andromaque éperdue :  
Voilà comme Pyrrhus vint s'offrir à ma vue ;  
Voilà par quels exploits il sut se couronner ;  
Enfin voilà l'époux que tu me veux donner.  
Non, je ne serai point complice de ses crimes ;  
Qu'il nous prenne, s'il veut, pour dernières victimes.  
Tous mes ressentiments lui seroient asservis.

The rhythm of the verse is like incidental music accompanying the picture she evokes. Andromaque is not remembering because she should but because she cannot help it. It is not oratory, but agony culminating in quiet indignation that she should embrace its cause. At once Céphise puts the alternative to her and Andromaque cannot accept it. It is hard to see how unconscious affection for Pyrrhus or mere duty towards Hector can be read into her words. It is not only virtue and it is not adherence to an ideal that she expresses. Andromaque remembers what Hector said to her so soon before his death because she likes to remember it ; she has nothing more precious, nothing that so pleases her mind. She loves her son — “ *ma seule joie, et l'image d'Hector* ” ; in Pyrrhus she sees the cause of her great

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loss. She will not marry him. For a moment she almost accepts the necessity of doing so, then retracts. She is faithful by nature but it is not Cornelian faithfulness, it is the living memory of Hector that makes it impossible for her to marry Pyrrhus.

In the interval between the third and fourth acts Andromaque has communed with her husband's spirit and feels inspired to accept Pyrrhus. Céphise foretells a glorious future for her mistress but Andromaque intends to kill herself immediately after the ceremony, trusting that Pyrrhus, "violent mais sincère", will keep his promise, feeling that she had kept hers, and protect her son. She justifies herself not through love, for she would consider herself bound to sacrifice that for her son, but through duty, loyalty to the dead. Yet will she not in word have given Hector his enemy as successor and is it not herself that she is sparing by her suicide? She feels Hector betrayed, she says, and will cut short her "infidèle vie". It is for her son that she will have done it :

Sacrifié mon sang, ma haine et mon amour.

She tries to argue that her death is atonement, yet it appears as an escape. Pyrrhus has shown her no more mercy than she is showing him. She appreciates him justly but has no admiration for him. Céphise is to remind him of his vow and

Qu'en lui laissant mon fils, c'est l'estimer assez.

This would be true enough if she had any alternative. Her greatest ambition for her son is that he should live and know his father's greatness and sometimes think of her.

In the next scene Cléone, alarmed at Hermione's deadly calm, tries to goad her into speech.

Fais-tu venir Oreste ?

answers Hermione, and is as brief to him when he comes obsequiously questioning. She interrupts him coldly :

Je veux savoir, Seigneur, si vous m'aimez.

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Oreste's list of proofs is characteristic of him :

mes serments, mes parjures,  
Ma fuite, mon retour, mes respects, mes injures,  
Mon désespoir, mes yeux de pleurs toujours noyés.

Hermione wants something quite different :

Vengez-moi, je crois tout.

But he is in the mood for grandiloquence. The weak beginning and ending of his reply is sufficient comment on the magnificent programme he offers her :

Hé bien ! allons, Madame :  
Mettons encore un coup toute la Grèce en flamme ;  
Prenons, en signalant mon bras et votre nom,  
Vous, la place d'Hélène, et moi, d'Agamemnon.  
De Troie en ce pays réveillons les misères ;  
Et qu'on parle de nous, ainsi que de nos pères.  
Partons, je suis tout prêt.

But she has not Helen's charm nor he Agamemnon's courage. There is no reason for her to assume that he would be victorious and she openly doubts it. She wants vengeance here and now without discussion or delay.

Je veux qu'à mon départ toute l'Épire pleure.

She bids him kill, and when he asks whom he must kill she breathes : " Pyrrhus ". He echoes her aghast and she fiercely harries him :

Hé quoi ? votre haine chancelle ?  
Ah ! courez, et craignez que je ne vous rappelle.

Hermione knows, and lets Oreste see, that her pride is barely able to silence her love, and for that reason she would not answer Cléone and hates to speak at length.

Oreste explains with what tact and concision he can that his treachery stops short at regicide. With a cruel emphasis she thrusts at him repeatedly :

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Ne vous suffit-il pas que je l'ai condamné ?  
Ne vous suffit-il pas que ma gloire offensée  
Demande une victime à moi seule adressée ?

With amazing ease she says,

Je ne m'en cache point : l'ingrat m'avoit su plaire,  
and sails on to her autocratic "réglez-vous là-dessus". Even  
in her confusion Hermione knows herself :

S'il ne meurt aujourd'hui, je puis l'aimer demain.

But Oreste expresses his decision :

Il faut. . . . Mais cependant que faut-il que je fasse ?

The emphasis of Hermione is hard packed with intent but Oreste  
is backing away :

Vous ne donnez qu'un jour, qu'une heure, qu'un moment.

Cette nuit je vous sers, cette nuit je l'attaque.

But Hermione can give no respite :

Mais cependant ce jour il épouse Andromaque.

It seems to her a final argument against delay. In simple  
brutality she is unsurpassed :

Enfin qu'attendez-vous ? Il vous offre sa tête.

Pyrrhus is going unguarded to the ceremony, all his precau-  
tions are for Astyanax. He has only to strike in order to win  
Hermione's love. But still he argues and she is out of patience :

Ah ! c'en est trop, Seigneur.

mais enfin je vois bien

Qu'il veut toujours se plaindre, et ne mériter rien.

She will go herself to the temple — and as she thinks of it her  
venom rises to a completeness of expression that takes the breath :



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Là, de mon ennemi je saurai m'approcher :  
Je percerai le cœur que je n'ai pu toucher ;  
Et mes sanglantes mains, sur moi-même tournées,  
Aussitôt, malgré lui, joindront nos destinées ;  
Et, tout ingrat qu'il est, il me sera plus doux  
De mourir avec lui que de vivre avec vous.

Oreste now submits to her will ; he has not been able to exert his own, and there is something moving in his words, although he is odious :

Et vous reconnoîtrez mes soins, si vous voulez.

Hermione does not rely on his promises, but, more than that, he has let her discover that she longs to go herself and stab Pyrrhus and watch him die looking in vain for Andromaque. She sends Cléone hurrying to Oreste : Pyrrhus must know that it is she who demands his death :

Qu'on l'immole à ma haine et non pas à l'État.

But the instant that Pyrrhus is announced she hopes again and is ready to forgive him before he has said a word. Cléone is given a different message for Oreste. He is to do nothing until he has seen her again.

Hermione knows and has told Oreste that if Pyrrhus does not die to-day she may love him to-morrow, and she is made to demonstrate the truth of her fierce threat almost as soon as she has made it, a moment after she had longed to see him dead. The meeting between Pyrrhus and Hermione has been held over until the end of the fourth act. Pyrrhus and Hermione are well known to the audience when they meet. Pyrrhus speaks twice and Hermione speaks twice. The audience is familiar with every aspect of the situation to which they will refer, and is free to concentrate on the subtleties of the dialogue. These four speeches are a fine example of the subtle vigour of Racine. The piercing lines run home the exact meaning, and all along them flow the strange inarticulate assertions of which they are composed and

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which the speaker realizes only as the taut clear cry of passion. The half-utterances of one line are often the clear statements of the next ; all the delicate shades of feeling change so rapidly that at one moment the character does not know what it is that grips him and the next he has spoken it aloud.

In his first meeting with Andromaque Pyrrhus had referred to Hermione's love for him, and in the last meeting with her he showed himself fully aware of the wrongs done to Hermione. He comes now and remarks with determined self-possession on his reception :

Vous ne m'attendiez pas, Madame ; et je vois bien  
Que mon abord ici trouble votre entretien.

Pyrrhus has almost succeeded in blustering his way into self-righteousness by finding a course of behaviour worse than the one which he has chosen.

Je ne viens point, armé d'un indigne artifice,  
D'un voile d'équité couvrir mon injustice :  
Il suffit que mon cœur me condamne tout bas ;  
Et je soutiendrais mal ce que je ne crois pas.  
J'épouse une Troyenne. Oui, Madame, et j'avoue  
Que je vous ai promis la foi que je lui voue.  
Un autre vous diroit que dans les champs troyens  
Nos deux pères sans nous formèrent ces liens. . . .

His tactlessness surpasses his sincerity :

Je voulais m'obstiner à vous être fidèle,

when Pyrrhus says,

Andromaque m'arrache un cœur qu'elle déteste.

Hermione suffers as she had made Oreste suffer by revealing the involuntariness of her love for Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus feels the more manly for his confession, for having come himself to account for his lapse of honour, but she is not appeased and promptly and ably accepts his invitation to revile him as he deserves. She is elaborately sarcastic, first at his expense, then at Andromaque's. At the thought that he has come to mock her she vindictively

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recalls Andromaque's dead, at once reproaching him with brutality and pointing out that she is not alone in being disgraced by the marriage. He reminds her that it is not for her to pity Troy ; she had in her agitation seemed to do so, but her intention was rather to taunt him with the monstrousness of the impending event from every point of view. Pyrrhus apologizes for having assumed an apology necessary ; she is, no doubt, as relieved as he to break their engagement. Hermione's pride has struggled in vain against her love since she came to Epirus. It is again overcome, although she has been given an opportunity to spare it, and there is in her list of humiliations a fierce acceptance of the truth and an urge to have it known that replaces pride. Hermione is humiliated by Pyrrhus's conduct but not, at heart, by her own. From her own point of view she has done right. What satisfaction would it be to her to have behaved otherwise, since it is Pyrrhus whom she loves even now and since there is no greater consideration to prevent her from telling him so ? Hermione is not ashamed. It is less the pain of pride than of unrequited love that she is trying to appease.

Je ne t'ai point aimé, cruel ? Qu'ai-je donc fait ?  
J'ai dédaigné pour toi les vœux de tous nos princes ;  
Je t'ai cherché moi-même au fond de tes provinces ;  
J'y suis encor, malgré tes infidélités,  
Et malgré tous mes Grecs honteux de mes bontés.  
Je leur ai commandé de cacher mon injure ;  
J'attendois en secret le retour d'un parjure ;  
J'ai cru que tôt ou tard, à ton devoir rendu,  
Tu me rapporterois un cœur qui m'étoit dû.  
Je t'aimois inconstant, qu'aurois-je fait fidèle ?  
Et même en ce moment où ta bouche cruelle  
Vient si tranquillement m'annoncer le trépas,  
Ingrat, je doute encor si je ne t'aime pas.

She asks him to wait until she has left Epirus before he marries Andromaque :

*Différez-le d'un jour ; demain vous serez maître.*

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Pyrrhus is silent, afraid no doubt that Andromaque may repent if he delays, and Hermione, her eyes fixed on him, jealously accuses him :

Tu lui parles du cœur, tu la cherches des yeux.

She has shown her heart to no avail and has nothing left but a threat which he ignores.

The last act opens to show Hermione alone on the stage at the mercy of a series of emotions which she cannot identify. She feels with unbearable intensity and tries in vain to think. She has hoped and renounced so many times that now her intentions have become unreal. She is lost in her own mind.

Où suis-je ? Qu'ai-je fait ? Que dois-je faire encore ?  
Quel transport me saisit ? Quel chagrin me dévore ?  
Errante, et sans dessein, je cours dans ce palais.  
Ah ! ne puis-je savoir si j'aime, ou si je hais ?

When she thinks of Pyrrhus, what hurts her most is his utter indifference — he has not even found it necessary to simulate those feelings towards her which were her due. It is only she who cannot cease to pity him. Let him die. But even in her delirium she knows that this is not what she wants, that it is her only escape from the moment's anger but that it will not deliver her from the sense of loss :

A le vouloir ? Hé quoi ? c'est donc moi qui l'ordonne ?  
Sa mort sera l'effet de l'amour d'Hermione ?  
Ce prince, dont mon cœur se faisoit autrefois  
Avec tant de plaisir redire les exploits,  
A qui même en secret je m'étois destinée  
Avant qu'on eût conclu ce fatal hyménée,  
Je n'ai donc traversé tant de mers, tant d'États,  
Que pour venir si loin préparer son trépas ?  
L'assassiner, le perdre ? Ah ! devant qu'il expire. . . .

Cléone returns to describe the joy of Pyrrhus as he leads Andromaque to the temple and to assure Hermione, who questions her

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repeatedly, that Pyrrhus has no thought for anything but Andromaque and her son. He goes unguarded to the ceremony and fears only for the safety of Astyanax. The attitude of Cléone is sometimes criticized. It is said that she foolishly enrages Hermione and is an example of Racine's use of the *confidante* as a puppet without individual existence, speaking only to provoke the main character to the desired response. Cléone, however, is not insanely wounding Hermione in order to provoke her jealousy or even incidentally in describing the wedding scene. Hermione has shown her only too clearly that her one desire is still to claim some part of Pyrrhus's attention and Cléone would convince her that she cannot hope to do so. She must forget him as he has forgotten her. She can hardly be expected to paint a remorseful Pyrrhus in the hope of moving Hermione to countermand her orders which may be, and, it transpires, already are carried out. She wants to persuade Hermione that Pyrrhus has had no thought of her and that "Oreste vous adore". Nevertheless Oreste hesitates to prove his adoration by becoming a regicide, a traitor, an assassin. He does not know what to do, he has a thousand fears, he fears and does not know himself. When Hermione thinks of Pyrrhus she is jealous, but when she thinks of Oreste she is merely vain ; she thinks not that she is denied what she wants but that it is she, Helen's daughter, who is powerless even over Oreste, to her little more than a coward. But he is a coward who has a right to expect something better of himself and who needs to prove something to himself as well as to her, but he is not sure what this murder will prove ; it stands between him and full knowledge of his fate :

Mais il se craint, dit-il, soi-même plus que tous.

Hermione bitterly appreciates the extent of her mother's power and contrasts it with her own. She has not even one avenger. At the thought that she is alone she feels her own strength surge in her. She will go herself. A rage to destroy fills her :

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Tout me sera Pyrrhus, fût-ce Oreste lui-même.

When she is at the height of her determination to act herself, Oreste comes in to tell her that the deed is done. Hermione is unable to realize it. "Il est mort ?" she asks, and listens to a long and vivid account of his death, then cries, "Qu'ont-ils fait ?" Oreste, who has let his followers kill Pyrrhus, explains that his zeal activated them and that the blows were truly hers :

Vous seule avez poussé les coups. . . .

It is what she was going to do when he came in but she does not recognize it as her own intention. The result is so different. She had not wanted Pyrrhus dead, she had wanted the moment of killing him for having forgotten her, but not the moment that must follow, that comes to her now when she denies the whole intention :

Tais-toi, perfide,  
Et n'impute qu'à toi ton lâche parricide.  
Va faire chez tes Grecs admirer ta fureur :  
Va, je la désavoue, et tu me fais horreur.  
Barbare, qu'as-tu fait ? Avec quelle furie  
As-tu tranché le cours d'une si belle vie ?  
Avez-vous pu, cruels, l'immoler aujourd'hui,  
Sans que tout votre sang se soulevât pour lui ?  
Mais parle : de son sort qui t'a rendu l'arbitre ?  
Pourquoi l'assassiner ? Qu'a-t-il fait ? A quel titre ?  
Qui te l'a dit ?

It was not what she wanted. Nothing is clearer to her than that. It was not she who wanted it. "Qui te l'a dit ?" she asks, not rhetorically but in order to know. And she is spared nothing, for Oreste tells her. Hermione is forced, now when it is too late, to understand what has happened to her, but it is only Oreste whom she judges :

Ah ! falloit-il en croire une amante insensée ?  
Ne devois-tu pas lire au fond de ma pensée ?  
Et ne voyois-tu pas, dans mes emportements,  
Que mon cœur démentoit ma bouche à tous moments ?

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Quand je l'aurois voulu, falloit-il y souscrire ?  
N'as-tu pas dû cent fois te le faire redire ?  
Toi-même avant le coup me venir consulter,  
Y revenir encore, ou plutôt m'éviter ?  
Que ne me laissois-tu le soin de ma vengeance ?  
Qui t'amène en des lieux où l'on fuit ta présence ?

She sees him as he is going to see himself, accursed. She has contrived already to build up a lost hope for herself and in an agony of regret speaks her most bitter words to Oreste :

Voilà de ton amour le détestable fruit :  
Tu m'apportois, cruel, le malheur qui te suit.  
C'est toi dont l'ambassade, à tous les deux fatale,  
L'a fait pour son malheur pencher vers ma rivale.  
Nous le verrions encor nous partager ses soins ;  
Il m'aimeroit peut-être, il le feindroit du moins.  
Adieu. Tu peux partir. Je demeure en Épire :  
Je renonce à la Grèce, à Sparte, à son empire,  
A toute ma famille ; et c'est assez pour moi,  
Traître, qu'elle ait produit un monstre comme toi.

Oreste has acted against his better judgment. He feels guilty of every possible crime, and through his guilt keeps shooting the thought that he has lost Hermione as he would have lost her if Pyrrhus still lived, Hermione "dont j'épouse la rage", whom he thinks of nevertheless until the end. In the unfortunate criminal Pylade still sees his friend and tries to hurry him from the palace before the way is barred. Andromaque, who had chosen to trust her son's life to the generosity of Pyrrhus rather than live as his wife, now proclaims herself his faithful widow. In a speech which Racine afterwards omitted she even finds that Pyrrhus dead has overcome the memory of Troy. Andromaque's bargain with herself is often criticized. She considers herself disloyal to Hector in marrying Pyrrhus and decides to expiate the wrong by immediate suicide. Yet the marriage is to bind Pyrrhus to his promise. It would seem, and even the suppressed passage does not contradict it, that although Pyrrhus's

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memory may, for a moment in Racine's imagination, have supplanted the memory of Hector, it is rather an exchange of loyalties than a discovery of love for him such as she knew for Hector. The death of Pyrrhus may win the allegiance of Andromaque ; she can love his memory. It was only her allegiance to Hector that she had been willing to sacrifice for his son and that is probably all that Pyrrhus's death can win from her ; he could have won it no other way. A different explanation of her behaviour is suggested by Pylade, who tries in vain to alarm Oreste with the suggestion that Andromaque may intend to use her position as Pyrrhus's widow to avenge Hector and Troy. But Oreste has no desire to escape. He will follow Hermione and expiate his crimes. But Hermione has killed herself upon the body of Pyrrhus, and when Oreste hears it he calls out that his cup is full and thanks the gods for their good measure, then slowly and horribly goes mad.

Grâce aux Dieux ! Mon malheur passe mon espérance.  
Oui, je te loue, ô ciel, de ta persévérance.  
Appliqué sans relâche au soin de me punir,  
Au comble des douleurs tu m'as fait parvenir.  
Ta haine a pris plaisir à former ma misère ;  
J'étois né pour servir d'exemple à ta colère,  
Pour être du malheur un modèle accompli.  
Hé bien ! je meurs content, et mon sort est rempli.  
Où sont ces deux amants ? Pour couronner ma joie,  
Dans leur sang, dans le mien il faut que je me noie ;  
L'un et l'autre en mourant je les veux regarder.  
Réunissons trois cœurs qui n'ont pu s'accorder.  
Mais quelle épaisse nuit tout à coup m'environne ?  
De quel côté sortir ? D'où vient que je frissonne ?  
Quelle horreur me saisit ? Grâce au ciel, j'entrevois . . .  
Dieux ! quels ruisseaux de sang coulent autour de moi !

All about him his failures take fantastic shape. He sees Pyrrhus covered with wounds but still living and tries to strike him down, but Hermione prevents him and he sees her embracing Pyrrhus.



## A NEW VIEW OF THE PLAYS OF RACINE

Serpents hiss about her head but they are not the furies come to rend him, for Hermione will do that.

Quoi ? Pyrrhus, je te rencontre encore ?  
Trouverai-je partout un rival que j'abhorre ?  
Percé de tant de coups, comment t'es-tu sauvé ?  
Tiens, tiens, voilà le coup que je t'ai réservé.  
Mais que vois-je ? A mes yeux Hermione l'embrasse ?  
Elle vient l'arracher au coup qui le menace ?  
Dieux ! quels affreux regards elle jette sur moi !  
Quels démons, quels serpents traîne-t-elle après soi ?  
Hé bien ! filles d'enfer, vos mains sont-elles prêtes ?  
Pour qui sont ces serpents qui sifflent sur vos têtes ?  
A qui destinez-vous l'appareil qui vous suit ?  
Venez-vous m'enlever dans l'éternelle nuit ?  
Venez, à vos fureurs Oreste s'abandonne.  
Mais non, retirez-vous, laissez faire Hermione :  
L'ingrate mieux que vous saura me déchirer ;  
Et je lui porte enfin mon cœur a dévorer.

He is denied the dignity of death and saved by his friend. He alone in the play lives on defeated. Pyrrhus and Hermione grappled with fate to their last breath and their own rash and passionate natures gave it an opening. Andromaque is given whatever victory is possible after the defeat of Troy. The conquerors are punished but the bereaved have only a meagre joy.

The situations in *Andromaque* are dramatic but not essentially extraordinary. One brilliant scene follows another, each changing the situation of all the characters and giving new possibilities of dramatic encounter and always leading on steadily to the end. The divided pairs meet, Oreste and Hermione, Hermione and Pyrrhus, Pyrrhus and Andromaque, the rivals, Pyrrhus and Oreste, Andromaque and Hermione, until the last and most terrible encounter in the mind of Oreste. There is tension as to the outcome, the outcome of the whole and of each scene, yet all is realized to have been expected. What is new and

## ANDROMAQUE

constantly exciting is the spectacle of the soul in agitation, its movement marked out in perfectly transparent words.

*Andromaque* reveals Racine's plenitude of powers, each of which he has so fully that it has at some time been singled out by critics as the greatest one, and each so in harmony with all the others that its existence has sometimes been overlooked and even denied. Henri Brémond in *Racine et Valéry* writes : " *Phèdre*, qui n'est pour nous qu'un chant, est pour eux une tragédie. . . ." On the other hand, F. L. Lucas, in *The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal*, says : " Pope or Gray, Racine or Boileau can speak perfectly ; they can declaim magnificently ; but they do not sing ".

## Les Plaideurs

1668

THE bent for comedy which declared itself in *Andromaque* is given full expression in *Les Plaideurs*, produced one year later, in 1668. *The Wasps* of Aristophanes inspired Racine to write a sketch for the Italian players, specially Scaramouche, to embroider, but they left Paris too soon and Racine was persuaded to undertake a comedy instead. He complains that for this purpose he would have preferred Menander and Terence as models. Racine follows Molière in showing the consequences of a particular mania on society. There is no political satire in *Les Plaideurs*. It is an excellent comedy of manners, but in spite of the frequent imitation of Aristophanes they are seventeenth-century manners.

Racine is surely the wittiest rhymers in French comedy. Even the bustle and sparkle of Molière's first scenes do not surpass the entry of Petit Jean, the porter who comes in dragging his master's sack of legal documents :

Ma foi, sur l'avenir bien fou qui se fira :  
Tel qui rit vendredi, dimanche pleurera.  
Un juge, l'an passé, me prit à son service ;  
Il m'avoit fait venir d'Amiens pour être Suisse.  
Tous ces Normands vouloient se divertir de nous :  
On apprend à hurler, dit l'autre, avec les loups.  
Tout Picard que j'étois, j'étois un bon apôtre,  
Et je faisois claquer mon fouet tout comme un autre.  
Tous les plus gros monsieurs me parloient chapeau bas :  
" Monsieur de Petit Jean ", ah ! gros comme le bras !

## LES PLAIDEURS

Mais sans argent l'honneur n'est qu'une maladie.  
Ma foi, j'étois un franc portier de comédie :  
On avoit beau heurter et m'ôter son chapeau,  
On n'entroit point chez nous sans graisser le marteau.  
Point d'argent, point de Suisse, et ma porte étoit close.  
Il est vrai qu'à Monsieur j'en rendois quelque chose.

He prepares the audience for the entrance of his master Dandin :

Il nous veut tous juger les uns après les autres.  
Il marmotte toujours certaines patenôtres  
Où je ne comprends rien. Il veut, bon gré, mal gré,  
Ne se coucher qu'en robe et qu'en bonnet carré.  
Il fit couper la tête à son coq, de colère,  
Pour l'avoir éveillé plus tard qu'à l'ordinaire ;  
Il disoit qu'un plaideur dont l'affaire alloit mal  
Avait graissé la patte à ce pauvre animal.

Dandin has been locked up, like the old man in *The Wasps*, to keep him from going to court, and Petit Jean, exhausted by his master, has come out into the street to get a little sleep. He lies down on the ground. He is at once disturbed by the clerk L'Intimé. They are just in time to catch Dandin as he jumps out of the window. Attracted by the noise, his son Léandre comes out calling for a light. He begs his father to return to the house but Dandin replies :

Je ne veux de trois mois rentrer dans la maison.  
De sacs et de procès j'ai fait provision.

*Léandre* : Et qui vous nourrira ?

*Dandin* : Le buvetier, je pense.

*Léandre* : Mais où dormirez-vous, mon père ?

*Dandin* : A l'audience.

The malicious Racine of the prefaces is at his best and takes full advantage of his friends' desire to see "si les bons mots d'Aristophane auroient quelque grâce dans notre langue". Dandin admonishes his son, giving a picture of the period as he does so :

A NEW VIEW OF THE PLAYS OF RACINE

L'argent ne nous vient pas si vite que l'on pense.  
Chacun de tes rubans me coûte une sentence.  
Ma robe vous fait honte : un fils de juge ! Ah, fi !  
Tu fais le gentilhomme. Hé ! Dandin, mon ami,  
Regarde dans ma chambre et dans ma garderobe  
Les portraits des Dandins : tous ont porté la robe ;  
Et c'est le bon parti. Compare prix pour prix  
Les étrennes d'un juge à celles d'un marquis :  
Attends que nous soyons à la fin de décembre.  
Qu'est-ce qu'un gentilhomme ? Un pilier d'antichambre.  
Combien en as-tu vu, je dis des plus hupés,  
A souffler dans leurs doigts dans ma cour occupés,  
Le manteau sur le nez, ou la main dans la poche ;  
Enfin, pour se chauffer, venir tourner ma broche !

The boy is not like his mother, " la pauvre Babonnette " :

Elle eût du buvetier emporté les serviettes,  
Plutôt que de rentrer au logis les mains nettes.

Léandre asks his father again to return to the house but Dandin demands,

Obtenez un arrêt comme il faut que je dorme,

and Léandre is quick-witted enough to reply :

Hé ! par provision, mon père, couchez-vous.

Dandin goes in, angry but persuaded by the legal term.

Léandre tells L'Intimé that he is in love with his neighbour Isabelle, daughter of Chicanneau, who is consuming all his fortune in the law court :

Tout auprès de son juge il s'est venu loger :  
L'un veut plaider toujours, l'autre toujours juger.

Léandre complains that Isabelle is locked up and neglected while her father pursues his expensive hobby of going to law :

Elle voit dissiper sa jeunesse en regrets,  
Mon amour en fumée, et son bien en procès.

Léandre wants " quelque honnête faussaire " to help him to set matters right. L'Intimé assures him that there is no shortage of

## LES PLAIDEURS

such men, and since the master of the art, his father, is dead, offers his services. He undertakes to deliver a forged writ to Chicanneau and a note to Isabelle.

Chicanneau bustles onto the stage giving a series of orders concerning his law cases. He is very thorough. He bribes his judge and his judge's servants. He has a professional witness. Before daybreak he comes knocking at Dandin's door. Petit Jean shuts the door in his face when he asks to see the judge. Chicanneau knocks again and inquires for the clerk. Refused again, he asks : " Et Monsieur son portier ? " Petit Jean accepts money but tells him to come back the next day. In vain Chicanneau demands the return of his money. He muses on the wickedness of the world. Things used to be cheaper :

J'ai vu que les procès ne donnoient point de peine :  
Six écus en gagnoient une demi-douzaine.  
Mais aujourd'hui, je crois que tout mon bien entier  
Ne me suffiroit pas pour gagner un portier.

With the entry of the next character Racine's verse becomes more daring :

Mais j'aperçois venir Madame la comtesse  
De Pimbesche. Elle vient pour affaire qui presse.

She too has come to visit her judge at this early hour. Chicanneau and the Comtesse de Pimbesche have a race to tell each other of their law suits. Chicanneau wins, but only by interrupting. For the last fifteen or twenty years he has been going to law about a young ass and a hen that strayed into his field. It is no simple matter :

Autre incident : tandis qu'au procès on travaille,  
Ma partie en mon pré laisse aller sa volaille.  
Ordonné qu'il sera fait rapport à la cour  
Du foin que peut manger une poule en un jour :  
Le tout joint au procès enfin, et toute chose  
Demeurant en état, on appointe la cause  
Le cinquième ou sixième avril cinquante-six.  
J'écris sur nouveaux frais. Je produis, je fournis

## A NEW VIEW OF THE PLAYS OF RACINE

De dits, de contredits, enquêtes, compulsoires,  
Rapports d'experts, transports, trois interlocutoires,  
Griefs et faits nouveaux, baux et procès-verbaux.  
J'obtiens lettres royaux, et je m'inscris en faux.  
Quatorze appointements, trente exploits, six instances,  
Six-vingts productions, vingt arrêts de défenses,  
Arrêt enfin. Je perds ma cause avec dépens,  
Estimés environ cinq à six mille francs.

But he is not beaten yet. He is going to try again. He turns to the Comtesse and mentions her case but forgets to listen when she begins to tell him about it. All her law suits are settled except " quatre ou cinq petits " :

L'un contre mon mari, l'autre contre mon père,  
Et contre mes enfants.

She has been given an adequate allowance and forbidden to go to law any more :

Je n'en vivrois, Monsieur, que trop honnêtement.  
Mais vivre sans plaider, est-ce contentement ?

She is about sixty and has been suing people for thirty years. She refuses to give up. Chicanneau begins to advise her but she is too impatient to listen for long, misunderstands him, and they quarrel. Their fellow-feeling vanishes. She is offended by his familiarity :

Bonhomme, allez garder vos foins.

In Act II La Comtesse de Pimbesche has given L'Intimé a writ to serve on Chicanneau for having insulted her. L'Intimé has a marriage contract which he wants to get Chicanneau to sign. Since Chicanneau and Dandin are too busy to consider the marriage of their children, they have to be trapped into doing so. Isabelle is quick-tempered and intelligent. L'Intimé tries in vain to punish her for her high-handedness. Chicanneau, suspecting that L'Intimé is an impostor, strikes him and knocks his hat into the mud. L'Intimé kneels down to draw up a report

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of this assault and Chicanneau kicks him. L'Intimé is delighted. Chicanneau tries to take possession of the report. L'Intimé encourages him :

Frappez : j'ai quatre enfants à nourrir.

Chicanneau is now convinced that L'Intimé is what he pretends to be :

Oui, vous êtes sergent, Monsieur, et très-sergent.

He begs L'Intimé to return the blows instead of prosecuting him, but L'Intimé refuses.

Léandre comes in disguised and L'Intimé manages to give him a message from Isabelle :

Plus, sa fille, au moins soi-disant telle,  
A mis un mien papier en morceaux, protestant  
Qu'on lui feroit plaisir, et que d'un œil content  
Elle nous défoit.

Léandre sends for the daughter who has torn up a writ served on her father. Isabelle appears and Léandre asks her her name and age. She says that she is eighteen and Chicanneau murmurs :

Elle en a quelque peu davantage,  
Mais n'importe.

The pompousness of Léandre makes Isabelle laugh and Léandre has a note made of it, and when Chicanneau intervenes, goes on imperturbably : "Mettez qu'il interrompt". The formidable ceremoniousness of legal proceedings makes Chicanneau uneasy, in spite or because of his experience. Léandre makes quite sure that Isabelle has read his note and wishes to marry him before he has the marriage contract signed. All the time Chicanneau admires the clever answers of his daughter :

La pauvre enfant ! Va, va, je te marierai bien,  
Dès que je le pourrai, s'il ne m'en coûte rien.

Rather improbably he signs the marriage contract without reading it, believing it to be an account of what has just taken place.



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He is immediately arrested and refused an explanation. A diversion is created by the appearance of Dandin at his window. Dandin and Chicanneau and the Comtesse de Pimbesche meet at last and can indulge their passions. The hearing of the case is even more farcical than the other legal mysteries shown, but the underlying satire is penetrating :

*Chicanneau* : Monsieur, je suis cousin de l'un de vos neveux.

*La Comtesse* : Monsieur, père Cordon vous dira mon affaire.

*L'Intimé* : Monsieur, je suis bâtard de votre apothicaire.

Dandin tells them all to go on talking and retires.

The litigants try to enter Dandin's house but Léandre objects. Petit Jean has shut the judge up in a room above the cellar. Dandin appears at an air-hole. Chicanneau at once continues his appeal. Dandin tells him to be quiet and, when Chicanneau persists, sentences him to jail. Chicanneau offers him some very good wine and is invited to repeat his case. The Comtesse de Pimbesche keeps interrupting. Finally she makes Chicanneau fall into the cellar. Petit Jean is not displeased.

Ils sont, sur ma parole,  
L'un et l'autre encavés.

Dandin comes out limping and when Léandre asks him to see a doctor, replies : " Qu'il vienne à l'audience ". Léandre now realizes that his father is incurable : " pour vous, sans juger, la vie est un supplice ", and arranges for him to exercise his talents at home :

Vous serez, au contraire, un juge sans appel,  
Et juge du civil comme du criminel.  
Vous pourrez tous les jours tenir deux audiences :  
Tout vous sera chez vous matière de sentences.  
Un valet manque-t-il de rendre un verre net,  
Condamnez-le à l'amende ; ou s'il le casse, au fouet.

Dandin has only one objection : " Et mes vacations, qui les païra ? " There is a timely theft by the dog Citron and at once

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Dandin demands barristers. Léandre recommends Petit Jean and L'Intimé : " Ils sont fort ignorants ". L'Intimé protests :

Non pas, Monsieur, non pas.

J'endormirai Monsieur tout aussi bien qu'un autre.

In Act III Chicanneau appears again. The Comtesse, as far as the plot is concerned, is a delightful luxury, another portrait, whereas Chicanneau is more closely connected with the other portraits and serves as a link in the slender plot that connects them. He hurries away to fetch his daughter, since he has heard that there is to be a trial. The trial scene is the most amusing in the play. Petit Jean rebukes his prompter for speaking too loudly and begins :

Ce que je sais le mieux, c'est mon commencement.

Messieurs, quand je regarde avec exactitude

L'inconstance du monde et sa vicissitude ;

Lorsque je vois, parmi tant d'hommes différents,

Pas une étoile fixe, et tant d'astres errants ;

Quand je vois les Césars, quand je vois leur fortune ;

Quand je vois le soleil, et quand je vois la lune ;

(Babyloniens)

Quand je vois les États des Babiboniens

(Persans)

(Macédoniens)

Transférés des Serpens aux Nacédoniens ;

(Romains)

(despotique)

Quand je vois les Lorrains, de l'état dépotique,

(démocratique)

Passer au démocrite, et puis au monarchique ;

Quand je vois le Japon. . . .

L'Intimé interrupts the flow :

Quand aura-t-il tout vu ?

Dandin quells L'Intimé :

Avocat incommode,

Que ne lui laissez-vous finir sa période ?

Je suois sang et eau, pour voir si du Japon

Il viendrait à bon port au fait de son chapon,

Et vous l'interrompez par un discours frivole.

Parlez donc, avocat.

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After much hilarious prompting Petit Jean gives up the attempt to remember his speech and puts the matter bluntly in his own words :

Pour moi, je ne sais point tant faire de façon  
Pour dire qu'un matin vient de prendre un chapon.

Dandin calls for witnesses but Léandre protests :

Les témoins sont fort chers, et n'en a pas qui veut.

When it is L'Intimé's turn he ranges far and wide and Dandin scolds :

Avocat, il s'agit d'un chapon.  
Et non point d'Aristote et de sa POLITIQUE,

and finally threatens : " Ho ! je te vais juger ". L'Intimé comes to the point and gabbles the facts of the case as quickly as he can. Dandin comments on the lengthy opening and rapid dismissal of what is most important and is assured : " Il est fort à la mode ". L'Intimé rambles on and Dandin tells him to be done or be damned.

*L'Intimé* : Je finis.

*Dandin* : Ah !

*L'Intimé* : Avant la naissance du monde . . .

*Dandin (bâillant)* : Avocat, ah ! passons au déluge.

But L'Intimé insists on beginning before the beginning of the world and Dandin falls asleep and topples over. He is picked up and shaken and wakes up completely to say " Aux galères ", then, reminded that the case concerns a dog, tells L'Intimé to conclude. L'Intimé holds up the puppies of the accused :

Venez, pauvres enfants qu'on veut rendre orphelins :

Dandin is touched. Besides, if he condemns the dog,

Voilà bien des enfants réduits à l'hôpital.

Chicanneau comes in and Dandin bids him farewell, then notices his beautiful daughter :

Que ne me disiez-vous que vous étiez son père ?

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He admires Isabelle and asks her :

Dis-nous : à qui veux-tu faire perdre la cause ?

N'avez-vous jamais vu donner la question ?

She refuses his offer of entertainment and Dandin assures her :

Bon ! Cela fait toujours passer une heure ou deux.

Léandre traps Dandin into consenting to the marriage and, having given a verdict, Dandin stands by it :

Puisque je l'ai jugé, je n'en reviendrai point.

Isabelle consents by refusing to appeal against the decision and her father at last gives way. Léandre pleads for the dog in what may be another of the occasional parodies of Corneille's style that can be discovered in *Les Plaideurs* and Dandin ends the festivities by promising more :

Hé bien, qu'on le renvoie :

C'est en votre faveur, ma bru, ce que j'en fais.

Allons nous délasser à voir d'autres procès.

Perrin Dandin and

Yolande Cudasne,

Comtesse de Pimbesche, Orbesche, et caetera,

are ludicrously tenacious and ingenious within the narrow limits of their mania. They are talented, so that their mania may be exposed to the full. But they are not aware of it as a mania. The means which they treat as an end in itself is shown to threaten the foundations of their existence, health, family, possessions, and in Dandin's case his very humanity. They can find no satisfaction without reference to it. It is not life, as it often seems to be in tragedy, but they who appear to be in the wrong. They are at a disadvantage before us. Racine's tragic characters can judge their passions and do judge and often condemn them. There is seldom anything at all comical about their

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helplessness. They are as aware of it as we are. Corneille's characters, on the other hand, act as they do because of the way they think, not in spite of it. His heroes approve of themselves utterly, otherwise they would act differently. We see them selecting feelings rather than feeling them, and their reasons often seem to us inadequate. Their inability to see themselves as we see them sometimes gives us the feeling of detachment and superiority which makes for the reception of comedy rather than tragedy.

## Britannicus

1669

THE first of the Roman plays, *Britannicus*, has a stronger political interest than *La Thébàide* or *Andromaque*. In it two great conflicting forces measure their strength in stealthy combat : Agrippine with her mature and dazzling arrogance, and Néron, her son, wicked as a viper, still discovering his own nature and trying to strike unseen. The play is called *Britannicus*, but Britannicus is merely the victim. His death is the incident which serves to establish Néron as a criminal in his own right, cutting him off once and for all from the state of being a mere beneficiary of his mother's crimes. Agrippine had disinherited Britannicus, Néron poisons him. Her evil deeds are in the past and she evokes them shamelessly, but his are all to come, and the end of the play leaves him on the threshold of the career of crime which has become proverbial. Racine is interested only in the first crime. He presents dramatically the spectacle of evil incarnate, its dawning self-knowledge which is not without a sort of horrible innocence and youth, for Néron is here, as Racine remarks, "un monstre naissant". In spite of his subtlety he is untried, a stranger to himself, and the appalling naturalness with which he does wrong, hurts and deceives and destroys, because he finds it satisfactory to do so, is the most terrible thing in the play. He has no need to be corrupted by Narcisse ; he is naturally corrupt, and he alone is ignorant of it. Narcisse smooths the way but Néron chooses it. He is finding out, almost naïvely, the things that give him pleasure and savouring them from the first like a connoisseur,

## A NEW VIEW OF THE PLAYS OF RACINE

but he does not notice and tremble to see that they are all bad things. The circumstances of the play are such that he can reveal his nature freely in action.

A glance at the *dramatis personae* gives the time, place and plot of most Racinian plays, and the names, nearly always legendary or historical, prepare the stage by setting the mood for the players, are themselves the most effective setting for what is going to happen. Agrippina, the widow of Domitius Ahenobarbus, to whom she bore a son, Domitius, married the emperor Claudius, her uncle, and persuaded him to accept her son as heir instead of Britannicus, his own son by a former wife, Messalina. Agrippina brought about a marriage between Octavia, the sister of Britannicus, and her son Domitius, who thereupon took the name Nero. She then poisoned her husband and had her son proclaimed emperor. For the first years of his reign Nero, guided by Seneca and Burrhus, satisfied both people and Senate and won the applause of all. But Agrippina, feeling the emperor in every sense her creation, cannot let him out of her hands. She wants him to be her puppet. She shares her son's privileges, receives ambassadors, feels that the legions will obey her as they obeyed her father, Germanicus. When the play opens Nero has for the first time openly defied her and she is impatiently demanding an audience which he denies her. The two do not meet on the stage until the second scene of Act IV.

The play opens with Agrippine waiting outside Néron's closed door. Everything happens here, where the emperor comes and goes, and all the ambitions of Rome, Agrippine as well as Burrhus and Narcisse, lie in wait for him. Albine, the singularly colourless confidante who delivers Agrippine from the necessity of talking to herself at improbable length, appeals to what is often called Agrippine's dominating tendency, the love of pomp. Is it fitting that while Néron sleeps Agrippine should await an audience :

Qu'errant dans le palais sans suite et sans escorte,  
La mère de César veille seule à sa porte ?

## BRITANNICUS

Long empty corridors that could accommodate her retinue seem to stretch unpeopled about her. The unusual circumstance justifies Albine's questions and the indignation which Agrippine can hardly contain accounts for her abundant explanation to her confidante. Néron has savoured the legitimate pleasures of sovereignty. Now :

Las de se faire aimer, il veut se faire craindre.  
Britannicus le gêne, Albine ; et chaque jour  
Je sens que je deviens importune à mon tour.

There is no pious pretence in Agrippine ; she is brutally direct.

Ai-je mis dans sa main le timon de l'État  
Pour le conduire au gré du peuple et du sénat ?

she asks vigorously. She reviews possible explanations of the abduction of Junie, the fiancée of Britannicus, showing considerable insight into her son's nature. Does the sadist want only "le plaisir de leur nuire" ? Or is he striking at her through them, since she is known to favour their engagement. When Albine reassures her and cites all the honours which she has received,

Votre nom est dans Rome aussi saint que le sien.

Néron devant sa mère a permis le premier  
Qu'on portât les faisceaux couronnés de laurier.

Agrippine shows that she does not value the outward signs of importance only for their own sake :

Je vois mes honneurs croître, et tomber mon crédit.

She does love homage, childishly, but she knows the value of prestige in the Roman court, watching and whispering, and weighing influence, ready to discard any member who becomes sufficiently weak. She wants not only the trappings but the sensation of power :

Et que derrière un voile, invisible et présente,  
J'étois de ce grand corps l'âme toute-puissante.



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She has not been deceived when Néron affectionately leads her away from her seat on his throne. Since that day she has been seeking an opportunity of bringing him to book, and now it has come.

But when at last the door opens Agrippine must endure further delay. Burrhus, the temperate and honourable counsellor of whom she is so jealous, has been before her with the emperor, who is already engaged with the consuls. Whilst others entered,

Déjà par une porte au public moins connue,

she has stood outside and waited. Agrippine can no longer contain herself. Her reply to Burrhus takes the form of a dozen challenging questions hurled at him in rapid succession. The speech gives the sense of immense power, not through the logical sequence of her arguments but because of the burning vitality of which it is the expression. Agrippine is now fully roused. A wealth of resounding verse lies at the service of her indignation. Her lines echo her brazen mood. Those of Burrhus in return are not hollow, although far quieter in tone ; they do not echo and re-echo like hers with the full significance of the thing named. Even when Burrhus asserts himself, when he flourishes a claim before her, it is a dry, measured gesture that mirrors his temperament. He has the dignity of self-control and absolute sincerity ; Agrippine, the majesty of force that disdains to reserve itself.

Prétendez-vous longtemps me cacher l'Empereur ?  
Ne le verrai-je plus qu'à titre d'importune ?  
Ai-je donc élevé si haut votre fortune. . . .

She draws herself up in pride and then returns to the attack :

Moi, fille, femme, sœur, et mère de vos maîtres !  
Que prétendez-vous donc ?

Her use of proper names and his, illustrates their different attitudes. She is speaking of her relations, indifferent as to whether they be good or bad so long as they be great and hers.

BRITANNICUS

Qu'il choisisse, s'il veut, d'Auguste ou de Tibère ;  
Qu'il imite, s'il peut, Germanicus, mon père.

The reply of Burrhus is orderly, logical and tactful. He deals with her tirade point by point. He knows his own worth and he is not intimidated by Agrippine. The burden of his speech is :

Ce n'est plus votre fils, c'est le maître du monde.

He owes his position to Agrippine but he was chosen by her for those very qualities which she now finds inconvenient. Rome is content with his handiwork. If she wanted a corrupter for her son, why did she not choose instead Calliste or Narcisse or Pallas, the freedmen who battered on Rome under Claudius ? Agrippine cannot refute him but she seizes on his last words, a prayer that Néron may continue as he has begun, and accuses him of suspecting the emperor. The next moment she bids him, since he is so content with his master, explain the abduction of Junie. Burrhus pleads that a member of the imperial family should not marry without the emperor's consent and Agrippine takes offence. Has she not herself countenanced the engagement ? Néron wishes to proclaim to everyone her waning authority. He shall see who is stronger, the emperor or his mother. Burrhus warns her to be more discreet. Does she wish the emperor to think that she has joined his enemy, the disinherited Britannicus ? Let her not publish her own discomfiture :

Et n'avertissez point la cour de vous quitter.

Agrippine retaliates with a reference to the inconvenience of lost prestige :

Quand Burrhus à sa porte ose me retenir ?

and he withdraws to give way to Britannicus.

Agrippine offers her sympathy to Britannicus but he suspects her and afterwards reveals his suspicions to Narcisse, Néron's slave and seducer. Britannicus is complacent. He is vaguely suspicious but not clear-sighted enough to suspect Narcisse. He

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seems puny when he speaks of involving the formidable Agrippine more than she desires. He is proud of his own noble nature and exceedingly young and vulnerable. He has been surrounded by wickedness from childhood. He refers almost nonchalantly to his stepmother's murder of his father :

Et qui, si je t'en crois, a de ses derniers jours,  
Trop lents pour ses desseins, précipité le cours ?

He takes leave of Narcisse to go to another freedman, Pallas, who had been Agrippine's lover and had helped her to win the favour of Claudius. Agrippine awaits him there.

Act I presented Agrippine lying in wait for Néron, discussing him with Albine and with Burrhus, and then Britannicus who is not only Néron's successful rival in love but a political weapon valued by Agrippine. Néron has challenged his mother by abducting Junie ; he strikes the weapon from her hand by the murder of Britannicus. There is no division of interest. The second act presents Néron accompanied by his good and evil counsellors, Burrhus and Narcisse. Falsely tractable, Néron protests :

N'en doutez point, Burrhus : malgré ses injustices,  
C'est ma mère, et je veux ignorer ses caprices.

He attacks her indirectly, through Pallas, whom he exiles forthwith. Narcisse has informed him of the arrangement between Britannicus and Agrippine, for Néron says :

et qui suivroit leurs pas,  
Les trouveroit peut-être assemblés chez Pallas.

Alone with Narcisse, who finds him disinclined for gross flattery, Néron blurts out his love for Junie, almost shyly at first ; then, having confessed, he continues with a burst of enthusiasm and ends with a long speech in which he coldly analyses and savours his experience. He is depraved in all he does and depraved in love, but Racine never forgets how young he is.

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Narcisse, c'en est fait, Néron est amoureux.

Depuis un moment, mais pour toute ma vie.  
J'aime, que dis-je aimer ? j'idolâtre Junie.

He is taken aback by himself :

J'ai voulu lui parler, et ma voix s'est perdue.

He describes the beauty of sorrow like a poet, but he has no pity and no desire to protect. He would dwell with delight upon the picture of Junie :

Triste, levant au ciel ses yeux mouillés de larmes,  
Qui brilloient au travers des flambeaux et des armes :  
Belle, sans ornements, dans le simple appareil  
D'une beauté qu'on vient d'arracher au sommeil.  
Que veux-tu ? Je ne sais si cette négligence,  
Les ombres, les flambeaux, les cris et le silence,  
Et le farouche aspect de ses fiers ravisseurs  
Relevoient de ses yeux les timides douceurs.

He is ravished by the light and shade, the sounds falling on the silence, by the warriors encircling Junie. When he retires to his room his imagination lingers still on the sorrow of Junie and he imagines himself renewing it :

J'aimois jusqu'à ses pleurs que je faisais couler.  
Quelquefois, mais trop tard, je lui demandois grâce ;  
J'employois les soupîrs, et même la menace.

He is further spurred on by Junie's indifference. She alone among the ladies of the court disdains to discover, he fatuously says,

Si César est aimable, ou bien s'il sait aimer ?

But she loves Britannicus, Narcisse reminds him, inciting him to jealousy. Jealousy is the most constant expression of Néron's love throughout the play. It helps to rationalize his sadism :

Néron impunément ne sera pas jaloux

but Racine had introduced Néron's cruelty as a feature of his

love before the question of jealousy arose. Néron hurts less to punish than to enjoy the spectacle of pain.

Although Néron is shown to be young in his love, his inexperience hedges him about with difficulties which he is loath to encounter. He is not young as Pyrrhus in *Andromaque* is young. He has not the verve of the older Pyrrhus. Wicked and undeterred by his conscience in all that he desires to do, Néron is reluctant to expend the necessary energy.

A combien de chagrins il faut que je m'apprête !  
Que d'importunités !

It is the inconvenience involved in crime that deters him. When Burrhus tries to hold him back he magnifies the inconvenience and Narcisse encourages him by waving it aside. The obstacles are his wife Octavie, his mother Agrippine, his tutors Burrhus and Sénèque, all Rome and the virtuous years behind him. Callously he mentions and dismisses his wretched young wife :

Non que pour Octavie un reste de tendresse  
M'attache à son hymen et plaigne sa jeunesse.

Besides, her barrenness condemns her. When Narcisse bids him divorce, it is the thought of the "implacable Agrippine" that restrains him. He fears that he will be discountenanced by his mother : De quel front soutenir ce fâcheux entretien ?

Narcisse does not merely try to shame him into rebellion, he tries to convince Néron that he has already rebelled with impunity by banishing Pallas, just as, later on in the play, he argues that the brewing of the poison has committed Néron to the murder of Britannicus. But Néron is not in need of argument ; in Agrippine he fears his mother and not a political opponent. It is her personal power that he fears ; he is at a loss before her. In her absence he can assert himself. In her presence,

Mon Génie étonné tremble devant le sien.

It is an ordeal that he avoids as long as he can. Agrippine has been on his track from the first scene of the play. She and her

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son and the audience are tense when at last the meeting occurs on the stage, and every word is like a move on a chess-board, with its visible consequence.

Narcisse shows no presumption throughout the scene. He endeavours to elevate himself by degrading his master. He merely precipitates matters, he causes nothing. There is an independent force of evil in Néron which takes council of itself. At the close of Scene 2 in the second act his plan is mature, and he keeps it from Narcisse.

Néron's exquisite courtesy at the opening of the battle with Junie chills the heart. He thinks her defenceless and richly endowed with the capacity to suffer, as he dallies in the graceful preliminaries which are to stop short in a threat. But he is to suffer at least as much as Junie in this encounter. New to the court and inflexible in her innocence, she gives him wound for wound. Racine has given Néron a worthy opponent in this inexperienced girl who is far from avoiding every pitfall, in spite of her intuitive tact. Piqued by her references to his mother's influence, Néron expands himself in adult pride, names himself the master of the world and alone fit to be her husband. Self-possessed, terse yet still suave, he offers her Octavie's position. Junie's reply, with its gentle disdain of his attitude towards her, is indescribably challenging; it gives the essence of her touching spirit, delicate yet independent to its utmost limits. It provokes Néron to harshness and he retorts :

Je vous ai déjà dit que je la répudie.  
Ayez moins de frayeur, ou moins de modestie.  
N'accusez point ici mon choix d'aveuglement ;  
Je vous réponds de vous : consentez seulement.  
Du sang dont vous sortez rappelez la mémoire ;  
Et ne préférez point à la solide gloire  
Des honneurs dont César prétend vous revêtir,  
La gloire d'un refus, sujet au repentir.

When he ignores her protestations and accuses her directly of

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loving Britannicus, she makes a reply as devastating in its simplicity as that of a daintier, more sophisticated Agnès, and as final :

Il a su me toucher.

To Britannicus she is all the world. His misfortunes bind her to him. Together they weep and are consoled. Néron amuses himself for a moment by giving her false hope and then imposes his conditions. Britannicus is not going to be kept from her. On the contrary, let him come. But if she says, or indeed, looks, a word of love, it will cost Britannicus his life. Hidden, but able to see and hear them, Néron will be present at the interview :

Caché près de ces lieux, je vous verrai, Madame.  
Renfermez votre amour dans le fond de votre âme.  
Vous n'aurez point pour moi de langages secrets :  
J'entendrai des regards que vous croirez muets ;  
Et sa perte sera l'infaillible salaire  
D'un geste ou d'un soupir échappé pour lui plaire.

When the slavish Narcisse was assuring him of his power to command love, Néron had secretly planned to regulate its expression if he could do no more.

Racine gives Junie a moment of anguished expectation before the entry of Britannicus, in which she tries in vain to escape, but he hurries her from view after the ordeal. He never makes great play with tears or any physical thing, only with their cause and effect. When Junie has been tried beyond endurance and Néron satiated with the spectacle yet enraged because her suffering is caused by love of his rival, a further interview between Néron and Junie could add nothing new—though Néron still desires it—and would be an unnecessary and therefore unseemly elaboration, a mere exhibition of pain and brutality. In Racine there is no elaboration. There is constant development of the theme from one situation to another. Nothing is offered as a spectacle while the action waits. Racine has been called “le cruel Racine”. He is, rather, relentless. Pain is incidental to his

end, but it is not his object to study the attitudes of pain for themselves, and Néron is the only one of his characters who does so. His aim in conceiving Scene 6 is that Néron should hover like a disembodied presence over the situation which he has brought about between the lovers, and its effect on him is given with economy in Scene 8 in his conversation with Narcisse. He is jealous yet consoled. He gloats :

Je me fais de sa peine une image charmante,  
Et je l'ai vu douter du cœur de son amante.

The end of the act is marred by the glib and unmotivated self-analysis of Narcisse.

It is of the effect on his mother that Néron first inquires when Burrhus announces to him in Act III that Pallas has submitted to exile. Néron maliciously asks :

Et de quel œil  
Ma mère a-t-elle vu confondre son orgueil ?

The Cornelian advice of Burrhus,

On n'aime point, Seigneur, si l'on ne veut aimer

and the suggestion that he imagines the irresistibility of his love, are countered by Néron with a careless insolence which makes explicit the reason for the amusement felt at the solemn recipe Burrhus gives for curing love. Malicious again, Néron ends the discussion :

Mais, croyez moi, l'amour est une autre science,  
.....  
Adieu. Je souffre trop, éloigné de Junie.

Left alone, Burrhus shows that he has read Néron's mood and realized its significance. Here is no passing whim but the crisis in his life. If Néron sheds blood once, if the hereditary method of gaining an end once replaces that laboriously taught by Burrhus and Sénèque, Burrhus knows that Néron will find it eminently satisfactory and never abandon it. The struggle is



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not between heredity and environment. Néron's environment included much corruption as well as the excellent Burrhus and Sénèque. His mother is not responsible merely for an evil force in his nature, but is a living independent power for evil herself, and his opponent. The struggle is not between good and evil in Néron—to whom good is but a negation of all his desires—but between the evil offspring and its similar but antagonistic parent. Burrhus mourns the absence of Sénèque and decides to appeal for aid to Agrippine, who occupies a considerable part of Act III. Néron appears at the beginning and in the last two scenes of this act, but its main part is given over to the people with whom Néron has to reckon. He is not allowed to desire and rebel and kill in a world of silhouettes. The people who cause Néron to reveal himself are there primarily for that purpose, but in order to do so they must exist in their own right. Act III is a series of scenes lighting up, one after another, the various effects two actions of the emperor have on the members of his household. As Racine says in the first preface to the play, having acknowledged his debt to Tacitus, "Il ne s'agit point dans ma tragédie des affaires du dehors. Néron est ici dans son particulier et dans sa famille."

First comes Agrippine, with her vigorous brevity, accusing Burrhus of the crimes of Néron, of teaching him, in descending order of enormity,

Le mépris de sa mère et l'oubli de sa femme !

Burrhus tries as always to conciliate her. Nothing irremediable has occurred as yet. She will control him better by gentler ways than by threats and outcry. But Agrippine has never the ability to try half-measures in thought or act or speech. Always outrageously blunt, she says with perfect truth,

Ah ! l'on s'efforce en vain de me fermer la bouche.

Her whole formidable strength is at the service of every event ; she disdains to threaten or to do less than her utmost. She

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brandishes her past crimes committed for his sake as so many weapons against her son. She will publish her guilt :

*Des crimes dont je n'ai que le seul repentir.*

And Britannicus shall be restored to his rightful place.

Alone with Albine, her confidante, Agrippine shrills out her grievances less militantly than in the preceding scene but far more intimately. The very texture of her resentment is recorded. Her fierce anger has turned peevish with keeping. She has been balked by Néron and is compelled to discourse with his inferiors. She must concur in becoming an inferior herself.

*Ah ! lui-même à mes yeux puisse-t-il se montrer !*

Not Octavie but Agrippine is being replaced by Junie. With characteristic economy of phrase she hurls her ideas like stones into hard speech :

*Quoi ? tu ne vois donc pas jusqu'où l'on me ravale,  
Albine ? C'est à moi qu'on donne une rivale.*

Octavie was unloved and ignored ; if Junie replaces her, says Agrippine bleakly,

*Ma place est occupée, et je ne suis plus rien.*

*Que dis-je ? l'on m'évite, et déjà délaissée . . .  
Ah ! je ne puis, Albine, en souffrir la pensée.*

She breaks off before the picture grows too clear. Quite literally, she cannot bear the thought of life without power and glory ; she prefers to remember the death prophesied for her at the hand of her son.

On the entry of Britannicus, Agrippine recovers herself. She is shocked at his attempt to involve her in conspiracy against her son and undertakes herself to besiege the emperor with hard words and soft until he gives way. Intrigue upon intrigue besets the court. Agrippine wrongly suspects Burrhus, and Néron believes them allied against him. Now, disappointed by the

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caution of Agrippine, Britannicus questions the sincerity of Narcisse, on whose advice he had acted. Against the advice of Narcisse he lingers here where people come and go and discusses his secret plans. Narcisse has faithfully tormented him with lying tales of Junie, as Néron bade. Britannicus is deceived but his love is not driven out. He believes the lies but he wants to see her again.

Je la voudrois haïr avec tranquillité.

To the most ingenious suggestions of Narcisse he answers only :

Je ne la puis donc voir ?

as if nothing had been said since his last request to see her. On the entry of Junie Narcisse flies away to inform Néron and leaves the lovers alone.

Junie has escaped and sought him out while Agrippine delays Néron in discussion. Briefly, without *coquetterie*, Junie assures him of her love, but Britannicus doubts, reproaches her at his leisure, as if nothing threatened. At Junie's touching sincerity he kneels repentantly before her and at that moment Néron enters. The emperor looks on at the charming tableau and ironically bids them continue. He has had Junie brought to his palace for the greater convenience of Britannicus. But Britannicus, so exacting in love and so credulous in politics, first reminds Néron of his less noble birth and then openly taunts him with his ignoble conduct. Perfectly self-possessed, although no longer to the point of irony, Néron smoothly replies :

Ainsi par le destin nos vœux sont traversés :

but he ends with the final insult to his junior :

Vous êtes jeune encore, et l'on peut vous instruire

and Britannicus makes the evergreen reply :

Et qui m'en instruira ?

All subtlety, all caution, now desert them and for a moment the emperor and the pretender are only two very young men quarrel-

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ling. Finally Britannicus penetrates to the last guard of Néron's complacency with the gibe,

*Je la laisse expliquer sur tout ce qui me touche,  
Et ne me cache point pour lui fermer la bouche*

and drives the emperor to call his guard and arrest Britannicus, since the imperial power has failed in every other way. The excuses Junie makes for the behaviour of Britannicus are double-edged ; excuses for him are accusations against Néron.

After the scene in which Néron, exasperated by the sight of the perfect understanding between Junie and Britannicus, threatens them in vain, comes the bitter thought that he owes this experience to Agrippine. This, then, was her reason for engaging him in conversation. He orders her arrest. When Burrhus questions the order, he silences him with a threat. He has now openly declared himself against his mother, but in her absence. When they first meet on the stage she has three charges to make against him : the abduction of Junie, the banishment of Pallas and her own arrest. Agrippine, in making her accusations, has no authority and no protection but her overpowering personality, and such influence as a mother has over a grown son. This is the trial of strength that Néron had feared, the very thought of which had held him from crime.

The fourth act opens to show Burrhus in his habitual role of peace-maker. Agrippine thrusts aside his advice and, gathering her strength, replies only :

*Qu'on me laisse avec lui.*

To this great scene, the meeting between these most intimate of enemies, everything in the play has been tending, and, after it, everything is decided. For this reason it has been thought that the play might well end here, that the last act is a rounding-off and not strictly necessary. This is not so. The subject of the play is the development of Néron which involves his rebellion

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against Agrippine. That his first crime is imminent and her downfall inevitable is made apparent by their interview, but they do not yet know themselves in these positions ; the fourth act and most of the fifth show them on the brink of change from one state to another, and the characteristic reaction of each. Agrippine can never bring herself to accept defeat and hopes beyond hope to the end. Néron cannot endure the force of his mother's spirit and takes steps to make it unnecessary to do so. As with Britannicus he will have removed opposition that he cannot overcome. His imperial power must eke out any lack of personal prestige. It is not exactly that the emperor lacks courage or distinction, but his courage is chilled by open action. He loves irony and innuendo, to have a means of withdrawal if necessary ; he seems to fear to commit himself, to fear what may prove a discreditable performance. He is untried, being young, but he lacks the impetuosity and spontaneity which carry the young easily into, if not through, the unknown. After this interview there is only one path before Néron and his mother, and it leads to a precipice. But their last few steps on the path, which now appears as the only one, are their most characteristic and add significance to their earlier movements, demonstrating why they could not do other than they did from the beginning.

They meet with a fresh resentment smarting in each, in Néron because his mother had tricked him through their last interview, in Agrippine because she has been placed under arrest. But what she says has been pent up for some time. Poised at this particular moment in the action when irritation is at its height in both characters, and coming at this moment in her life when all she has done may prove to have been done in vain, her abundant orderly eloquence, her passion held in leash and deliberately used in attack, makes relevant a wealth of allusion to the past as the parent of this ungrateful hour. It is at once self-justification, claim and threat.

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Agrippine sits in the emperor's presence and, in command of herself and the situation, assigns a seat to him.

AGRIPPINE, *s'asseyant.*

Approchez-vous, Néron, et prenez votre place.  
On veut sur vos soupçons que je vous satisfasse.  
J'ignore de quel crime on a pu me noircir :  
De tous ceux que j'ai faits je vais vous éclaircir.

All that she says now is known to Néron and to everyone. But that she should say such things of herself to her son is a new happening for both of them. The character of Agrippine springs before the eye from every phrase of her speech of over a hundred lines. The wealth of allusion compressed into such a line as

Je fléchis mon orgueil, j'allai prier Pallas

and her rapidity of transition from point to point,

Le sénat fut séduit : une loi moins sévère  
Mît Claude dans mon lit, et Rome à mes genoux.  
C'étoit beaucoup pour moi, ce n'étoit rien pour vous

hastening towards the climax, prevent her dramatic argument from languishing into a mere recital of the dead past. The rhythm of the whole speech is one of the triumphs of Racine. Her headstrong progression through bloodshed towards her goal is portrayed well in the lines, culminating in the heavy pause before renewed effort :

Silanus, qui l'aimoit, s'en vit abandonné,  
Et marqua de son sang ce jour infortuné.  
Ce n'étoit rien encore. Eussiez-vous pu prétendre. . . .

She says sonorously :

Je fus sourde à la brigue, et crus la renommée.

But the speech is an organic whole sustained in all its parts by devices of poetry and oratory which lose in value, as they should, when they are detached. She does not shrink from reliving the last moments of Claudius ; her deed springs up from the

description more illuminated than the death-bed of Claudius. Vigorously she challenges him :

Voilà tous mes forfaits. En voici le salaire.

Secure in the freshly evoked memory of her crimes, presented to him as so many debts, Agrippine reproaches her son in detail, mentions each offence separately, calls him to account and ends in speech as she had begun in action, by reversing their positions.

To her orderly display of passion Néron opposes a mocking detachment. He would appear completely unconcerned and replies as one who has not deserved this torrent of reproach, with ironical reassurance :

Je me souviens toujours que je vous dois l'Empire ;  
Et sans vous fatiguer du soin de le redire,  
Votre bonté, Madame, avec tranquillité  
Pouvoit se reposer sur ma fidélité.

Briefly he examines and dismisses her complaints. She demands gratitude for a gift which she is trying to withdraw :

Mais si vous ne réglez, vous vous plaignez toujours.

He ends in a note of accusation :

Vous voulez présenter mon rival à l'armée :

Agrippine, genuinely indignant that the dangerous possibility, which she wished to use as a perpetual threat against Néron and nothing more, should be used against her in this way, bursts out :

Moi, le faire empereur, ingrat ? L'avez-vous cru ?  
Quel seroit mon dessein ? qu'aurois-je pu prétendre ?

And overwhelmingly :

Quels honneurs dans sa cour, quel rang pourrois-je attendre ?

Then suddenly Agrippine grows tender and with dramatic suddenness Néron gives way to her. Her tenderness is usually de-

scribed as maternal love, but Agrippine grows tender as she thinks of her catalogue of crimes committed for her only son who now denies her what she considers the fruit of those crimes. She loves her handiwork because it is hers, the result of the only material she had to work upon, and she knows all its faults. What she loves most about it is its dependence on her, what she hates most is its self-assertion, not its shortcomings. If it is mother love, it is of the basest. It is not protection—that is no longer necessary—but self-preservation. She said on her first appearance :

Ah ! que de la patrie il soit, s'il veut, le père ;  
Mais qu'il songe un peu plus qu'Agrippine est sa mère.

She now begins plaintively :

Vous ne me trompez point, je vois tous vos détours :  
Vous êtes un ingrat, vous le fûtes toujours.  
Dès vos plus jeunes ans, mes soins et mes tendresses  
N'ont arraché de vous que de feintes caresses.  
Rien ne vous a pu vaincre ; et votre dureté  
Auroit dû dans son cours arrêter ma bonté.  
Que je suis malheureuse ! Et par quelle infortune  
Faut-il que tous mes soins me rendent importune ?  
Je n'ai qu'un fils. O ciel, qui m'entends aujourd'hui,  
T'ai-je fait quelques vœux qui ne fussent pour lui ?

She is deeply moved by her own misfortunes. She refers to the prophecy that she will die by her son's hand, but what is that to her, from whom power has been taken in her lifetime. Calm before the thought of death, Agrippine cannot endure the thought of a life of obscurity. She acknowledges Néron's power over her but reminds him of her immense prestige. Her tenderness ends menacingly. It is dangerous to kill Agrippine :

Avec ma liberté, que vous m'avez ravie,  
Si vous le souhaitez, prenez encor ma vie,  
Pourvu que par ma mort tout le peuple irrité  
Ne vous ravisse pas ce qui m'a tant coûté.



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This is not merely vanity. Burrhus, warning Néron of his mother, acknowledged :

Agrippine, Seigneur, est toujours redoutable.  
Rome et tous vos soldats révèrent ses aïeux ;  
Germanicus son père est présent à leurs yeux.

The greatest weapon to her hand, whether she is ever foolish enough to use it or not, is Britannicus, and Néron, determined to deprive her for ever of this weapon, wearied by argument and loving secret design, abruptly replies :

Hé bien donc ! prononcez. Que voulez-vous qu'on fasse ?

All her requests are ready. Her emotion gone, Agrippine makes practical demands ; the punishment of her enemies, the appeasement of Britannicus, Junie and Pallas, free entry to the emperor and finally, peevishly :

Que ce même Burrhus, qui nous vient écouter,  
À votre porte enfin n'ose plus m'arrêter.

It has been said that her emotion blinds her to the extraordinary ease with which Néron agrees to everything. But she thinks that he is afraid of her ; and this is, after all, the first time that she is not completely right in thinking so. What fear he feels angers him and drives him to murder, not submission. But she is behaving perfectly rationally, and so is Néron. He deceives her partly from love of deception but also because by allaying her suspicions he can more easily dispose of Britannicus. Néron loves pleasure and ease ; he detests argument and resistance, even when powerless. He is wearied by a conversation that he cannot conduct along lines of his own choosing. There must be no restraint, not even self-restraint. It is a freedom which leads him through crime to insanity. Life indulges Néron to the top of his bent, but Racine shows the tendency while Néron is still sane and before he is a criminal. Néron likes to do wrong without being reminded that it is wrong, to get the pure taste of his

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pleasure without the bitter label of that pleasure's name. Here, he frees his mother for very much the same reason as he had had Britannicus arrested, to end the argument and get his way without further ado.

Néron, having passed through the ordeal of his mother's presence, has still to withstand Burrhus. His hesitating spirit is three times in succession subjected to skilled assault. It is characteristic of his court that Burrhus has regained the emperor's confidence only because of Agrippine's hostile greeting. Néron, trusting Burrhus again, tells him in the line that is almost a self-portrait,

*J'embrasse mon rival, mais c'est pour l'étouffer.*

Never again shall Agrippine have opportunity to make him undergo such an experience :

*C'en est trop : il faut que sa ruine  
Me délivre à jamais des fureurs d'Agrippine.  
Tant qu'il respirera, je ne vis qu'à demi.  
Elle m'a fatigué de ce nom ennemi ;  
Et je ne prétends pas que sa coupable audace  
Une seconde fois lui promette ma place.*

Burrhus tries to sway him with the thought of public opinion but Néron retorts,

*Suis-je leur empereur seulement pour leur plaire ?*

Burrhus now makes an impassioned but most skilful appeal to Néron. Like Agrippine, he is fighting for his life's work, but, unlike her, he is disinterested. Caesar has complained of the restraint involved in satisfying his people. Burrhus makes their welfare seem a valuable possession of the crown. He identifies virtue and freedom and eloquently proves that, having committed himself to violence, a ruler is for ever subject to the cruellest compulsion, increasingly hated and increasingly endangered.<sup>1</sup> He kneels at offended Caesar's feet and for the

<sup>1</sup> Racine may well have hoped that Louis XIV would benefit by his advice to monarchs.

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second time that day the young ruler is bidden to take a life or forgo his desire. Burrhus has made crime seem difficult, and virtue easy and pleasant. Néron chooses the easy way. His mother had shown crime as a most successful means to an end, and, under his false submission, Néron had determined to adopt her method.

But while Burrhus awaits the reconciliation between Néron and Britannicus, Narcisse enters to report that the poison is already brewed to dispatch Britannicus. Burrhus had driven home the point that crime is an exacting master. Narcisse comes as a slave to perform the vilest tasks in order to smooth the way to murder. This, he says in his turn, is the easiest thing. Even its name is changed and killing becomes an insignificant act, a mere matter of efficiency, demonstrable at pleasure :

Seigneur, j'ai tout prévu pour une mort si juste.  
Le poison est tout prêt. La fameuse Locuste  
A redoublé pour moi ses soins officieux :  
Elle a fait expirer un esclave à mes yeux ;

Néron briefly thanks him and bids him desist. The first attempts Narcisse makes to force his master fail. Britannicus is already offended and will in time, no doubt, hear of this attempt on his life. He will do what the emperor fears to do. But Néron never responds to a threat and is not intimidated. Then Narcisse asks if Néron is going to renounce Junie for the sake of Britannicus and is haughtily rebuffed :

C'est prendre trop de soin.

But when Narcisse taunts him with the complacency of Agrippine, who is proclaiming his reform as a personal triumph, Néron's reserve drops from him and he appeals intimately to the slave :

Mais, Narcisse, dis-moi, que veux-tu que je fasse ?

This is his most constant purpose, the defeat of Agrippine. She, not Britannicus, offers the greatest challenge to his supremacy

and outrages his pride. But he fears to commit himself. He would be no longer free, as Burrhus had said. He recapitulates the arguments of Burrhus and Narcisse pours scorn on them. Narcisse has the most hateful lines in all the plays to say. Like Agrippine and Burrhus before him, he has every reason to exert himself in argument. Whether or not Néron stands in danger if Britannicus lives to discover the plot, Narcisse certainly does. He has everything to lose if he fails, everything to gain if the emperor becomes his accomplice. His suave brutality towards the mob is repaid by them at the end of the play.

Ils adorent la main qui les tient enchaînés.  
 Vous les verrez toujours ardents à vous complaire.  
 Leur prompt servitude a fatigué Tibère.  
 Moi-même, revêtu d'un pouvoir emprunté,  
 Que je reçus de Claude avec la liberté,  
 J'ai cent fois, dans le cours de ma gloire passée,  
 Tenté leur patience, et ne l'ai point lassée.

But Néron still remembers the way in which Burrhus has shaken his confidence. If he does this he will again be exposed to just censure. Narcisse then discredits Burrhus by denying his sincerity and attributing to him the motives of Néron's other adversaries. Néron's confidence in Burrhus had been momentarily restored by the hostility of Agrippine. It had been lost by the direct criticism of Burrhus himself. It is lost again by the criticism reported by Narcisse. Narcisse persuades him that this action, far from laying him open to further blame, will free him from all blame for ever. Narcisse puts into the mouth of the accused, skilfully left unnamed, what the emperor will find most galling, contempt for those accomplishments which he values most highly in himself, and for which he wins forced applause :

Pour toute ambition, pour vertu singulière,  
 Il excelle à conduire un char dans la carrière,  
 A disputer des prix indignes de ses mains,  
 A se donner lui-même en spectacle aux Romains,

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A venir prodiguer sa voix sur un théâtre,  
A réciter des chants qu'il veut qu'on idolâtre,  
Tandis que des soldats, de moments en moments,  
Vont arracher pour lui des applaudissements.

Néron had mentioned the value of the public esteem ; Narcisse persuades him that it is already forfeit and Néron succumbs.

When Act V opens, the day is drawing to a close. The first scene brings vividly before the audience the significance of what Néron is about to do off-stage. Britannicus, still deceived by Narcisse, is going joyfully to a banquet given by Néron to celebrate their reconciliation. He stands rejoicing in his young love whilst Junie alone is downcast. One day at court has taught her suspicion, but her essential candour is reflected in her description of duplicity :

Combien tout ce qu'on dit est loin de ce qu'on pense !

Fear strikes her and she feels suddenly as if she were seeing Britannicus for the last time. When he is about to leave her, she holds him back for yet a moment, whereupon Agrippine enters and bids him hasten to the banquet. Britannicus goes out gaily to his death.

While her adversary triumphs unsuspected until too late by all his guests, Agrippine holds the stage in self-congratulation. This scene should not be regarded as a mere device for giving Néron time to poison Britannicus. It serves this purpose incidentally but it has other objects. Agrippine displays here those qualities against which Néron has been battling throughout the play and which make them intolerable to each other. Instead of filling his stage with the theatrical poisoning scene at the banquet which delighted the histrionic Néron, Racine floodlights the force against which the poisoning is a reaction. Agrippine triumphs openly, shamelessly, while Néron defeats her, characteristically, behind the scenes. This is the main theme of the play, the struggle between mother and son in which, flogged on by love and hate, he reveals his character. Through being what

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they are to the end, one is overcome and the other is able to overcome her. Scene 3 of the last act does not only give time for action to occur off-stage, it also develops the action before the eyes of the audience. Agrippine, still with supreme faith in the power of her own will to influence others, and inclined to overlook everything else, displays that faith here more forcefully than she has done as yet. She also further reveals the nature of her son, at the same time throwing light on her own reaction to it.

To Agrippine the tears wet on the face of Junie are only incidentally the result of sorrow and she demands, ready to be offended,

*Doutez-vous d'une paix dont je fais mon ouvrage ?*

When she has undertaken to protect, distress is an insult.

*Il suffit, j'ai parlé, tout a changé de face*

She has never failed before. Even at the end of the play she cannot accept defeat. Her faith in herself makes her overlook the hard fact that everything she recounts as a personal victory is a personal defeat for her son. On the other hand, overweening as she is, she is not to be dismissed as foolishly vain. Her great review of the past in Act IV, as well as serving other purposes, justifies her in her general attitude towards Rome, and almost clears her of that frequent charge of frivolous feminine vanity, of over-valuing pomp and show. On such things her prestige largely depended. It is to be remembered, too, that if she has been deceived in this particular instance, Néron has employed his considerable actor's talent to that end. The exasperating nature of the struggle for Agrippine lies in the fact that she has done this thing herself, put him in the position to defy her. Even now he has not brought himself to rebel against her face to face, he has decided to choose an easier way. As she stands eloquently describing to Junie Néron's elaborate display of affection towards her, behind the scenes he is acting his part to the end. He does

not spare his talents in either scene. He is in his element ; the world is the theatre of his will. By conforming to a part he can bend everything to his desire without the effort of overcoming opposition. Acting itself requires no effort. It is a delight in which he indulges for its own sake in both scenes, far more than is absolutely necessary for his purpose.

When Burrhus comes appalled from the banquet onto the stage, Junie is given no words for her grief, only an apology because it is uncontrollable. The words in the few lines of Scene 4 announcing the death of Britannicus are the least noticeable in the play. They barely serve to hold up the gestures of the three figures on the stage, messenger and two listeners who for a moment lend all their being to the thought of this deed. The murder holds the stage and almost effaces the people on it, existing only through it, as in Act II. Néron held the stage, although invisible, while Junie and Britannicus spoke. When Junie has gone, Burrhus describes what has happened. He tells only what is necessary. All the light is centred on Néron, on his blasphemous presentation of the poisoned cup. Even when Britannicus falls, attention is drawn back to Néron who explains that this, which is death, is but one of the fits to which Britannicus has been subject from childhood. The most practised courtiers hear him out, as unmoved as he.

Néron, on the way from his calmly committed crime, starts as he comes upon his mother. But she brings him up short and hurls the accusation in his face. Again he wants to defy her, but all his retorts swerve a little and although he makes his intentions perfectly clear, daring to remind her that she has murdered too, he does not match her directness with one forthright statement of his own. She ignores the intervention of Narcisse, who wishes to bring Néron to avowal, and calls Néron's future deeds upon him as avengers of the death she knows she will suffer at his command. She bade him stop and now she gives him leave to go. Glancing at her in hatred, he goes without a word of reply.

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He will certainly desire to eliminate what he has failed to subdue, and Agrippine knows it.

The curse Agrippine lays upon her son is considered as a punishment satisfying the moral requirements of a play and preventing an evil character from triumphing at the end. But in any case Néron does not triumph. The last two scenes of the play are often felt to be unnecessary, but without them the presentation of both Agrippine and Néron would be incomplete. Racine does not consider characters in a vacuum but characters in relation to a special set of circumstances. Scene 7 shows the position through the wise eyes of Burrhus, and Agrippine is right to despair. She could never have collaborated with Burrhus even if she had so desired, for she would have accepted nothing less than supremacy, and Burrhus was content with a beneficial influence over Néron. Moreover, it is only the hostility of the one which wins Burrhus the trust of the other. It is not Agrippine's suspicion which causes the catastrophe. Burrhus is less shocked by the murder than by the self-possession with which it was done :

Néron l'a vu mourir sans changer de couleur.  
Ses yeux indifférents ont déjà la constance  
D'un tyran dans le crime endurci dès l'enfance.

And yet he had found it necessary to prevaricate to Agrippine about an act which it cost him little to perform. If he is without conscience he is not without fear ; but Agrippine knows that she can never again rely on that fear to restrain him. It will, rather, spur him to prove it groundless.

When Albine comes, in the last scene, to say of Junie with unfortunate complacence :

Madame, sans mourir, elle est morte pour lui,

a sense of unreality descends on the stage. Albine's description fails to evoke the presence of Junie and that is a more serious defect than the anachronism involved in her becoming a Vestal.



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Néron watches and dares not hinder Junie, but Narcisse attempts to do so and is killed by the mob he had despised. Néron, far from being triumphant, is unmanned by grief at the loss of Junie. Albine ends her uninspired recital by begging Agrippine to go to him lest

Il se perdrait, Madame,

and reality returns to the stage with Agrippine's prompt, merciless

Il se feroit justice,

But she goes before another mood and another corrupter can bar the way. She knows as well as Burrhus, who grimly ends the play,

Plût aux Dieux que ce fût le dernier de ses crimes !

that Néron is not repenting of a crime but grieving because he has not profited by it. She goes to encounter a Néron who has had his first taste of destruction. The outcome of the action has been as decisive for him as for Britannicus. His future lies before him as inevitable as death ; restraint, internal and external, cast aside, only the picturesque material details remain to be revealed by time. He fenced with her throughout the action of the play ; he never maintains an attitude of authority over her in her presence. Néron's transition from stage to stage is characteristic of his behaviour throughout. His crisis steals upon him in a day busy with love and hate, and his deed finds him out. He had not openly sustained a trial of strength with Agrippine. When the moment has come and gone he cannot feel her subdued. He has taken himself unawares, as well as all the others. And when, his plan successfully carried out, he is nevertheless balked of his desire and faced with the unforeseen, he has, unlike Agrippine, no reserve of strength to withstand the blow.

## Bérénice

1670

RACINE summarizes the subject of *Bérénice* as follows :  
“ Titus, qui aimoit passionnément Bérénice, et qui même, à ce qu'on croyoit, lui avoit promis de l'épouser, la renvoya de Rome, malgré lui et malgré elle, dès les premiers jours de son empire”. He takes what is most bitter in death, the parting, for his *dénouement*. Bérénice, as he presents her, will not find it harder to take leave of life. The play is a tragedy only because of Racine's ability to portray a love of which this can be said without exaggeration. If Bérénice had committed suicide, a sudden gust of anger or despair, because it was the last, would stand as the most significant action of her soul. But the measure of Hermione is given in Hermione's last action, that of Phèdre in her confession to Thésée, and Bérénice's in her farewell. (It is Racine's most serious study of love as opposed to passion ; it is a most dramatic play, the struggle of one mind to keep a foothold in another, to recognize that it can go no further, to another or from itself, and to step back, accepting that knowledge.) Racine's subject is not sentimental ; it is not the broken heart or the disappointment of Bérénice because she must leave Titus, but “ l'effort qu'elle se fait pour s'en séparer ”. After that the play ends. But there is no conflict between love and duty in *Bérénice*. Bérénice feels no Cornelian glow of achievement when she learns to renounce. Perhaps a conflict between love and a conception of duty to oneself may be found in Corneille's *Tite et Bérénice*. Racine's emperor never seriously considers exchanging Rome for Bérénice,

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nor is it suggested that he wants to lose his world for love. It would be a loss to him, a personal loss greater than that of Bérénice, and it takes her some time to realize this. As soon as she realizes it she acquiesces and goes, because she has no satisfactory alternative. He does not consider compromising his career for her by committing an unconstitutional act at the start, but she shows little comprehension of the excellent reasons for his refusal. It is enough for her that they weigh so much with him.

The staging of the whole play is given in six lines in the first speech of the play, which is made by Antiochus, King of Comagène :

Souvent ce cabinet superbe et solitaire  
Des secrets de Titus est le dépositaire.  
C'est ici quelquefois qu'il se cache à sa cour,  
Lorsqu'il vient à la Reine expliquer son amour.  
De son appartement cette porte est prochaine,  
Et cette autre conduit dans celui de la Reine.

It is said that Antiochus, himself a king, was unlikely to remark on "la pompe de ses lieux", but he is an unsuccessful rival for the love of Bérénice and painfully conscious of the greater splendour of Titus. In the second speech of the play the story of Antiochus is given with characteristic economy. He is "cet ami fidèle" and he was "son amant autrefois", and she is "de Titus épouse en espérance". He chooses this unpropitious moment to tell her that he still loves her and sends Arsace to request a private interview for the purpose.

As soon as Antiochus begins to speak, the flaw in his otherwise fine character is apparent. He carries his destiny in his character. He is the victim of mood. It is natural that at the thought of leaving Bérénice he should, like Titus, be greatly disturbed. But he has not Titus's ability to make a clean cut, to remain unshaken in a decision. He has more insight than anyone in the play, but his actions are guided by feeling, not by reason. He is not at all uncontrolled or hysterical, like Oreste, but he has

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compulsions to do the things which he gives excellent reasons for not doing. For five years he has accepted a position which must have involved incalculable suffering, and in the play he allows himself to be used as an intermediary between the two lovers, to the convenience of his rival and his own torment. He is infinitely kind and infinitely weak and Bérénice is fond of him, the amiable and useful friend who is governed by her pleasure. He has the Racinian self-knowledge that gives no power to refrain but almost makes the reason an accomplice by showing that there is no way to content except this one, where self-destruction is as well. His complete self-knowledge prevents him from ever being a comic figure in a role frequent in comedy. Bérénice has not been guilty of a selfish flirtation. She had taken all hope from him and at this moment he has less than he ever had, and this is the time that he chooses to declare his love. Why ? At the end of his soliloquy Antiochus has already aroused interest on his own behalf and is not merely a device for keeping the lovers apart and thus increasing the dramatic tension.

Hé bien ! Antiochus, es-tu toujours le même ?  
Pourrai-je, sans trembler, lui dire : " Je vous aime " ?  
Mais quoi ? déjà je tremble, et mon cœur agité  
Craint autant ce moment que je l'ai souhaité.  
Bérénice autrefois m'ôta toute espérance ;  
Elle m'imposa même un éternel silence.  
Je me suis tu cinq ans, et jusques à ce jour  
D'un voile d'amitié j'ai couvert mon amour.  
Dois-je croire qu'au rang où Titus la destine  
Elle m'écoute mieux que dans la Palestine ?  
Il l'épouse. Ai-je donc attendu ce moment  
Pour me venir encor déclarer son amant ?  
Quel fruit me reviendra d'un aveu téméraire ?  
Ah ! puisqu'il faut partir, partons sans lui déplaire.  
Retirons-nous, sortons ; et sans nous découvrir,  
Allons loin de ses yeux l'oublier, ou mourir.  
Hé quoi ? souffrir toujours un tourment qu'elle ignore ?  
Toujours verser des pleurs qu'il faut que je dévore ?

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Quoi ? même en la perdant redouter son courroux ?  
Belle reine, et pourquoi vous offenseriez-vous ?  
Viens-je vous demander que vous quittiez l'Empire ?  
Que vous m'aimiez ? Hélas ! je ne viens que vous dire  
Qu'après m'être longtemps flatté que mon rival  
Trouveroit à ses vœux quelque obstacle fatal,  
Aujourd'hui qu'il peut tout, que votre hymen s'avance,  
Exemple infortuné d'une longue constance,  
Après cinq ans d'amour et d'espoir superflus,  
Je pars, fidèle encor quand je n'espère plus.  
Au lieu de s'offenser, elle pourra me plaindre.  
Quoi qu'il en soit, parlons : c'est assez nous contraindre.  
Et que peut craindre, hélas ! un amant sans espoir  
Qui peut bien se résoudre à ne la jamais voir ?

Antiochus has the Racinian desire to retaliate against the power of the person he loves in vain, not to be entirely without effect. Why should he suffer alone and she not even know it. Now he realizes that he had hoped all along : "cinq ans d'amour et d'espoir superflus". His real motive—desire for the pity of Bérénice, which is the nearest he can come to her love—is not unearthed until nearly the end of his speech.

Arsace returns with a favourable reply from Bérénice. Antiochus has ordered everything to be made ready for his departure from Rome and Arsace questions him, with remarkable density, as to his reasons. Antiochus replies helplessly :

Que veux-tu que je dise ?  
J'attends de Bérénice un moment d'entretien.

This is what he has been doing for five years and what he continues to do until the end of the play.

Before Bérénice appears curiosity has been aroused as to her behaviour towards Antiochus, whose love it must be difficult for her not to realize and who is to be made miserable by her happiness. Bérénice is, as a rule, unaffected and direct. She is clear-sighted and does not value "tant d'amis nouveaux que me fait la fortune". But she accuses Antiochus of "quelque négligence", Antiochus,

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dont les soins

Ont eu tout l'Orient et Rome pour témoins.

She is completely self-absorbed. She accepts his devotion unthinkingly. She has missed him and tells him so as a matter of course. She wants her old friend to share her triumph and, as well, to sympathize with her past anxiety. After the death of his father Vespasian, Titus had altered to her and turned from love to grief. She reminds Antiochus that it is the man and not his rank that she loves :

moi dont l'ardeur extrême,

Je vous l'ai dit cent fois, n'aime en lui que lui-même ;

Moi qui loin des grandeurs dont il est revêtu,

Aurois choisi son cœur et cherché sa vertu.

In a rush of confidence such as she is accustomed to feel towards Antiochus, Bérénice tells him once again of the quality of her love for Titus. But Antiochus asks only whether they are still estranged. Bérénice, giving the first firm stroke to the background of her story, answers that since the night when

Le sénat a placé son père entre les Dieux

the filial grief of the new emperor had abated and he had shown his love by generous gifts of territory, adding Arabia and Syria to Palestine, as tokens, she feels she has reason to think, that she is to be empress. Then, says Antiochus without preamble, I have come to say good-bye for ever. But he has difficulty in coming to the point, and, from a beginning first nervous, then formal, he gradually finds his way to the most expressive love-address in the play, and not unnaturally, for he is the only one whose love is not returned.

Au moins souvenez-vous que je cède à vos lois,

Et que vous m'écoutez pour la dernière fois.

Si dans ce haut degré de gloire et de puissance

Il vous souvient des lieux où vous prîtes naissance,

Madame, il vous souvient que mon cœur en ces lieux

Reçut le premier trait qui partit de vos yeux.

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Her brother Agrippa had favoured his suit and she perhaps might have accepted his homage if Titus had not come to her

dans tout l'éclat d'un homme  
Qui porte entre ses mains la vengeance de Rome.

His love was sworn to silence but it lived. Bérénice, for all her cry,

Ah ! que me dites-vous ?

lets him talk on, for he has great admiration for Titus whom she loves to hear praised, and Antiochus is not slow to realize it. He has seen the world as an empty background for the queen.

Rome vous vit, Madame, arriver avec lui.  
Dans l'Orient désert quel devint mon ennui !  
Je demeurai longtemps errant dans Césarée,  
Lieux charmants où mon cœur vous avoit adorée.

At last he followed her to Italy. Until Vespasian died and Titus succeeded him, there had been hope that the lovers would be separated. Now Antiochus is taking leave of her, loving her more than ever.

Bérénice cannot be angry for long, although his lovely sighing forms part of what she thinks it right to call "un discours qui m'outrage". She has an ugly line to say — a rare thing in these plays :

Il fût quelque mortel qui pût impunément.

Her last lines reduce him to the role of another man's perpetual representative :

Cent fois je me suis fait une douceur extrême  
D'entretenir Titus dans un autre lui-même.

He understands her at once and his abrupt sentences of reply show how it has irked him never to be seen or heard except as far as he can conjure up her lover :

Et c'est ce que je fuis. J'évite, mais trop tard,  
Ces cruels entretiens où je n'ai point de part.

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Je fuis Titus ; je fuis ce nom qui m'inquiète,  
Ce nom qu'à tous moments votre bouche répète.  
Que vous dirai-je enfin ? Je fuis des yeux distraits,  
Qui me voyant toujours, ne me voyoient jamais.

Bérénice is sorry to see him go, and confused, it would seem, as to her regret. She does not want to hear and be moved even to pity by love-speeches that are not Titus's, and the vague return Antiochus had hoped for from his declaration of love is made against her will. She confesses that she feels "une douleur secrète". She must forget this friend so pleasantly associated with her love and for his own sake.

J'en dois perdre plutôt jusques au souvenir.  
Tu veux donc que je flatte une ardeur insensée ?

She has little difficulty in forgetting Antiochus, although Phénice, her practical and even stage-managing confidante, warns her that she may need him yet. Titus has not yet announced his determination to marry her and she says concisely :

Rome vous voit, Madame, avec des yeux jaloux ;  
La rigueur de ses lois m'épouvante pour vous.  
L'hymen chez les Romains n'admet qu'une Romaine ;  
Rome hait tous les rois, et Bérénice est reine.

The obstacle is real to Phénice. It is only the court, not the body of the people, which is willing to accept Bérénice. The warning of Phénice adds weight to that of Paulin in Act II. But Bérénice wants to continue that lyric flight Antiochus had discouraged by his own confession of love. She will not argue about the will of Rome. Her lover is omnipotent. It is quite simple for her :

Titus m'aime ; il peut tout : il n'a plus qu'à parler.

The second act is occupied with Titus trying to nerve himself to do that simple thing, speak and dismiss her. His decision is made before he appears, he only tests it over again and finds it sound, but in the carrying out of the decision the whole char-



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acter of the man comes into play and it can be seen how and even why he made it. The first act ends with Bérénice's brightest memory of him. Rome has significance for her because it is his, and in her own way she compares the sun with her beloved to say how bright it is :

De cette nuit, Phénice, as-tu vu la splendeur ?  
Tes yeux ne sont-ils pas tous pleins de sa grandeur ?  
Ces flambeaux, ce bûcher, cette nuit enflammée,  
Ces aigles, ces faisceaux, ce peuple, cette armée,  
Cette foule de rois, ces consuls, ce sénat,  
Qui tous de mon amant empruntoient leur éclat ;  
Cette pourpre, cet or, que rehaussoit sa gloire,  
Et ces lauriers encor témoins de sa victoire ;  
Tous ces yeux qu'on voyoit venir de toutes parts  
Confondre sur lui seul leurs avides regards ;  
Ce port majestueux, cette douce présence.

And surely, she demands, she is not exaggerating :

Parle : peut-on le voir sans penser comme moi  
Qu'en quelque obscurité que le sort l'eût fait naître,  
Le monde, en le voyant, eût reconnu son maître ?

She will not have his glory due to anything, it comes of itself, not of her love or his position.

In Act II Titus asks those questions which have become well-known merely because they seemed in themselves so unremarkable :

A-t-on vu de ma part le roi de Comagène ?

Et que fait la reine Bérénice ?

Yet there is a certain grace about them, the emperor's inquiries for the visiting king and queen. The ease of Titus's first remarks, however, merges into the facile when he says :

Trop aimable princesse !

Paulin receives little of the emperor's attention in the first scene. In the second he proves himself a good courtier, always ready

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to take or give a cue for confidence and hazarding as little as possible. Titus does not reveal his decision yet. He is keenly aware that his affections are a public concern and wants to know the general view of them. He is given a compliment for reply. He tries again and receives a cautious invitation to show his own attitude towards the matter. The court, says Paulin, will always be amenable. Titus has seen the court indulgent towards the horrible antics of Nero. He does not want acceptance in that spirit. Paulin then replies freely and the possibility that Bérénice may be regarded as an exception is at once ruled out. Paulin does not waste time discussing the rightness of Rome's objection, "soit raison, soit caprice", or the merits of Bérénice :

Elle a même, dit-on, le cœur d'une Romaine.

But she is a queen, a foreigner, and unacceptable to Rome. No warrior, no emperor, has gone against her will in this, and Cleopatra could not alter it :

Jules, qui le premier la soumit à ses armes,  
Qui fit taire les lois dans le bruit des alarmes,  
Brûla pour Cléopâtre, et sans se déclarer,  
Seule dans l'Orient la laissa soupirer.  
Antoine, qui l'aima jusqu'à l'idolâtrie,  
Oublia dans son sein sa gloire et sa patrie,  
Sans oser toutefois se nommer son époux.

Caligula and Nero set their limit here. Bérénice is excluded by foreign birth from her happiness. There is a special prejudice against her because two queens of her family were married to the freedman Félix. On Racine's ability to make the prejudice of Rome seem a real barrier depends the impression made by the protestations of Titus. Pauline recalls the cause of the prejudice and amply illustrates its strength. Even if he does so mainly because he thinks that this is what Titus wants to hear, what he says is still true ; the past has proved this prejudice to be very strong. Rome will bear wrongs that seem more galling,

but not this. Not only the present but the future is involved.  
Rome will not recognize

les fruits illégitimes

Qui naissent d'un hymen contraire à ses maximes.

Paulin supposes that the Senate will summon Titus before the day is over and at the end of Act IV the summons comes.

The first thought of Titus is for the greatness of the sacrifice demanded of him. He does not question its necessity or impulsively declare that he will never make it. He merely feels how great it is. Bérénice has become "un plaisir nécessaire". It was for her sake that he had coveted the throne in his father's lifetime. Titus is not a man who takes advice but he must always consider it, to be doubly assured that he is right. He has made his decision before he discusses the problem. He had sent for Antiochus to ask him to accompany Bérénice on her departure the next day. He had hoped that the change in him, which Bérénice described to Antiochus in Act I, would have warned her. He wants to spare himself pain and Bérénice humiliation by having her go before his decision is acclaimed. He is not indifferent to her feelings but insensitive to them and preoccupied with his own. Bérénice speaks of Rome's "cruelle joie" in Act V, and Antiochus in Act III hates to think "à quel mépris Titus l'a condamnée". Titus is not affecting a concern he does not feel for Bérénice. But from the first hour of his reign he had felt a compulsion stronger than love. It is not for Bérénice's sake that he desires to be ruler now.

Je sentis le fardeau qui m'étoit imposé ;  
Je connus que bientôt, loin d'être à ce que j'aime,  
Il falloit, cher Paulin, renoncer à moi-même ;  
Et que le choix des Dieux, contraire à mes amours,  
Livroit à l'univers le reste de mes jours.  
Rome observe aujourd'hui ma conduite nouvelle.  
Quelle honte pour moi, quel présage pour elle,  
Si dès le premier pas, renversant tous ses droits,  
Je fondois mon bonheur sur le débris des lois !

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All that remains is to inform Bérénice of this. He speaks of her not only with gratitude but with admiration and tenderness. The simplest lines he speaks are those describing her. The exaggeration and tendency to strike an attitude return to him as soon as he speaks of himself. Paulin has no fear that the conqueror of Judea will be unable to subdue his passions but Titus does not so much subdue them as allow the strongest one to declare itself. He remembers his youth at the corrupt court of Nero and the efforts he was obliged to make in order to conform to Bérénice's ideal. Because of her he distinguished himself in war and, still unacceptable to her, became renowned as the benefactor of the multitude. It was through her that he made the discovery of his abilities and he cannot now renounce the free use of them by beginning as he does not intend to continue. The requirements of her nature have encouraged in him the qualities which will cause her to lose him because of a political obstacle. Character is fate in *Bérénice* to this extent. It is because of his ability to conform to her ideal in the first place that he reacts to the external obstacle as he does ; the play is not less profound because the obstacle is external. On the contrary, a psychological obstacle would lessen the tragic loss of both characters. They are completely content in their love. They cannot hope to forget or to replace each other. Titus feels that to renounce Bérénice is "renoncer à moi-même". Briefly Racine indicates the essential difference between the love of each for the other. For Titus the greatest praise of Bérénice is this :

Depuis cinq ans entiers chaque jour je la vois,  
Et crois toujours la voir pour la première fois.

But her love has grown and she will say :

Il étoit temps encor : que ne me quittiez-vous ?

Bérénice comes, confident and unbidden, and Titus fails once more to bid her farewell. Her speech seems to have the fewest and the shortest words in the play. All she says, many times

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over, is that she loves him, and she speaks for some time. But the great commonplace rings new. It is not ingenuity or wit, but that Bérénice is exquisite when she is most unstudied and that her love itself is rare. She has only to discover and reveal her grievances to say :

*Vous êtes seul enfin, et ne me cherchez pas.*

Ah ! Titus, car enfin l'amour fuit la contrainte  
De tous ces noms que suit le respect et la crainte.<sup>1</sup>  
De quel soin votre amour va-t-il s'importuner ?  
N'a-t-il que des États qu'il me puisse donner ?

There is no fuller expression of what Voltaire calls "l'amour qui n'est qu'amour" than the plain request :

*Voyez-moi plus souvent, et ne me donnez rien.*

Titus takes leave of her, having said nothing more explicit than  
Rome . . . l'Empire . . .

and Bérénice, dismayed, recalls what she has said and wonders if it has offended him. Has she shown too much love and too little gratitude, and pity for his grief ? What has she said ? Her sentences are broken up as she hurries from point to point. When she comes upon the truth she turns from it and does not rest until she has found a less dangerous reason : he is jealous of Antiochus. Reassured, she almost wishes that Titus were not the greatest in the world, that she might prove her love by rejecting a greater rival.

The third act opens to show Titus, the magnificent, asking Antiochus :

*Vous avois-je sans choix  
Confondu jusqu'ici dans la foule des rois ?*

<sup>1</sup> Bérénice herself draws attention to the change she has involuntarily made from "Seigneur" to "Titus". Racine uses an involuntary change from "vous" to "tu" with great effect in the plays ; for example in Phèdre's confession to Hippolyte ; in Néron's response to the goading of Narcisse ; several times in Hermione's declaration of love to Pyrrhus.

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Why then is he leaving Rome? Titus requires his services. He must bid Bérénice farewell on Titus's behalf. In this scene the replies of the astonished Antiochus are, with one exception, barely more than exclamations. In contrast, Titus, having meditated at length on the perversity of his illustrious fate, delivers himself in marvellously rounded phrases of his undoubtedly genuine grief :

Plaignez ma grandeur importune.  
Maître de l'univers, je règle sa fortune ;  
Je puis faire les rois, je puis les déposer :  
Cependant de mon cœur je ne puis disposer.  
Rome, contre les rois de tout temps soulevée,  
Dédaigne une beauté dans la pourpre élevée.

He has that great precedent :

Jules céda lui-même au torrent qui m'entraîne.

He has tender concern for the dignity of Bérénice as well as for his own and commends her, again with territorial gifts, to the keeping of Antiochus, whose love for her he does not realize. And he does not consider that in evading the ordeal of farewell he may be obliging her to face a greater one. He is concerned for Bérénice's "gloire" ; he does not think that he owes her the memory and finality of a farewell.

Antiochus has been overwhelmed by the imperial grandeur. Encouraged by Arsace, he tries to hope that he will profit by the change of circumstances. But he foresees only jealousy and frustration. He will be forced to pity her sorrow for the loss of his rival. The gross worldliness of Arsace beguiles him for a moment, before he is reclaimed by scruples that Arsace, in his lack of delicacy, sees as the weaknesses of a great spirit.

For a moment it may appear that in Antiochus Racine is being drawn towards a super-refinement of emotion for its own sake. This is never true of him. He had not paused to contemplate the intricacies of Antiochus's spirit but passed through them to the egoism of Bérénice in the next scene, which is thus

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given full value. The portrait of Bérénice would be incomplete if Antiochus were absent from the play. His unselfish devotion is unnoticed. He is the cause of her lover's jealousy and nothing more. She speaks wildly, even stupidly. Her cruelty is incidental to her mood ; she is not interested enough in him to wound him deliberately. With less compunction than Andromaque to her unwanted lover, she says quite callously to Antiochus, " *la mort dans le sein* " on Titus's behalf :

Si moi-même jamais je fus chère à vos yeux.

Que vous a dit Titus ?

When she has been told she exclaims, her words defining the nature of distance :

Nous séparer ? Qui ? Moi ? Titus de Bérénice !

If something less simple than incredulity is required to do justice to the situation, it must be left to Phénice to supply it. It is given to Phénice to say :

Il faut ici montrer la grandeur de votre âme.

Even Antiochus is not being deliberately noble when he praises Titus. He is trying to offer comfort. The Cornelian hero, for all his energy, acts in order to contemplate his nobility. The Racinian character, if he is ever noble, is so incidentally. Bérénice, having appealed to Phénice, ignores her and chooses the easiest course. She refuses to believe what she has heard. But she believes it, in spite of herself. It is to be observed that the reason Titus gives so often for renouncing her is the first one she thinks of for his not doing so :

Il ne me quitte point, il y va de sa gloire,

and only afterwards she thinks of his love. She succeeds at last in offending Antiochus by declaring that he has set a trap for her. But whether he has or not, she never wants to see him again. Bérénice dismisses him cruelly, not in order to wound

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him but merely to persuade herself that she has just cause for offence. She wounds him for love of Titus, he cannot even displease her in his own right.

Antiochus, as if he had loved her for any reason, feels that she has set him free by her suspicion. Arsace disagrees and is proved right. Beginning with the thought of her ingratitude when he was being, if anything, rather more than just to her lover, Antiochus passes in a few lines to the request :

Va voir si la douleur ne l'a point trop saisie.

Act IV opens to show time creeping for Bérénice, as for Juliet, as she awaits a message from Titus. Phénice returns to assure her that Titus is not indifferent and is coming at her request. Phénice is the tiring-woman of Bérénice with a due sense of elegance, verbal as well as visual :

Laissez-moi relever ces voiles détachés,  
Et ces cheveux épars dont vos yeux sont cachés.  
Souffrez que de vos pleurs je répare l'outrage.

But Bérénice replies :

Laisse, laisse, Phénice, il verra son ouvrage.

Titus has a long soliloquy before he meets Bérénice. He gives definite shape to the external obstacle and considers the various courses open to him. When they meet the attitude of each is already known and attention is centred in the struggle of one mind with the other. Titus fails to persuade himself that Rome will accept Bérénice. If Rome has learnt anything it is to distrust kings :

Rome jugea ta reine en condamnant ses rois.

He dismisses the thought of abdication :

Ah ! lâche, fais l'amour, et renonce à l'Empire :  
Au bout de l'univers va, cours te confiner,  
Et fais place à des cœurs plus dignes de régner.  
Sont-ce là ces projets de grandeur et de gloire



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Qui devoient dans les cœurs consacrer ma mémoire ?  
Depuis huit jours je règne ; et jusques à ce jour,  
Qu'ai je fait pour l'honneur ? J'ai tout fait pour l'amour.  
D'un temps si précieux quel compte puis-je rendre ?  
Où sont ces heureux jours que je faisais attendre ?  
Quels pleurs ai-je séchés ? Dans quels yeux satisfaits  
Ai-je déjà goûté le fruit de mes bienfaits ?

Titus is less anxious that the thing should be done than that he should have the doing of it. When, later, he mentions suicide as a way out, it does not seem to occur to him that this will deprive the empire of his services as thoroughly as abdication. There is no mention of a successor, good or bad ; much consideration of Titus without the empire, but no consideration of the empire without Titus. If duty had been the decisive factor it should have been the thought of the needy empire, not the " vil spectacle aux humains " which filled his mind. It has often been remarked that Titus seems to have a premonition of the short life before him. He desires, apparently, to be a benevolent ruler, and it is certainly his duty to rule benevolently, but a duty with which desire happens to coincide. Abdication would involve a greater sacrifice than renouncing Bérénice, and this is increasingly clear in the following scene. Titus is not choosing between duty and desire but between a lesser desire and a greater one.

Most naturally in Scene 5 of the fourth act Bérénice preserves the unity of place by coming forth unceremoniously from her room to meet Titus. She is as direct as possible, but he is inclined to strike an attitude and, if she will allow it, to provide her with one. But at last he echoes her words : " il faut nous séparer ". Bérénice replies as the thoughts come, one springing from the heart of another :

Ah ! cruel, est-il temps de me le déclarer ?  
Qu'avez-vous fait ? Hélas ! je me suis crue aimée.  
Au plaisir de vous voir mon âme accoutumée  
Ne vit plus que pour vous. Ignorez-vous vos lois,  
Quand je vous l'avouai pour la première fois ?

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A quel excès d'amour m'avez-vous amenée !  
Que ne me disiez-vous : " Princesse infortunée,  
Où vas-tu t'engager, et quel est ton espoir ?  
Ne donne point un cœur qu'on ne peut recevoir."  
Ne l'avez-vous reçu, cruel, que pour le rendre,  
Quand de vos seules mains ce cœur voudroit dépendre ?  
Tout l'Empire a vingt fois conspiré contre nous.  
Il étoit temps encor : que ne me quittiez-vous ?  
Mille raisons alors consoloient ma misère :  
Je pouvois de ma mort accuser votre père,  
Le peuple, le sénat, tout l'empire romain,  
Tout l'univers, plutôt qu'une si chère main.  
Leur haine, dès longtemps contre moi déclarée,  
L'avoit à mon malheur dès longtemps préparée.  
Je n'aurois pas, Seigneur, reçu ce coup cruel  
Dans le temps que j'espère un bonheur immortel ;  
Quand votre heureux amour peut tout ce qu'il désire,  
Lorsque Rome se tait, quand votre père expire,  
Lorsque tout l'univers fléchit à vos genoux,  
Enfin quand je n'ai plus à redouter que vous.

But the future then was forbidden territory to Titus :

Mon cœur se gardoit bien d'aller dans l'avenir,

he replies. As she had told him of her love growing until " mon âme . . . ne vit plus que pour vous ", he tells her how, for him too, life has become merely the condition of one pursuit :

Mais il ne s'agit plus de vivre, il faut régner.

Bérénice loses her temper and bids him a brief farewell. But the word pulls her back :

Je n'écoute plus rien ; et pour jamais, adieu.  
Pour jamais ! Ah ! Seigneur, songez-vous en vous-même  
Combien ce mot cruel est affreux quand on aime ?  
Dans un mois, dans un an, comment souffrirons-nous,  
Seigneur, que tant de mers me séparent de vous ?  
Que le jour recommence, et que le jour finisse,  
Sans que jamais Titus puisse voir Bérénice. . . .

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Then she is angry with herself for supposing that he will regret her and he replies that he will not live long to do so. At this Bérénice asks why she must leave him ; Rome has forbidden them to marry but not to see each other. Titus feels that she is evading the problem. He finds her influence irresistible and knows what she suggests to be impractical. When he tries to expound

Maintiendrai-je des lois que je ne puis garder ?

she counters with the statement :

Vous ne comptez pour rien les pleurs de Bérénice.

Bérénice is brisk, peremptory, as she measures the private right, which seems to her so real, against the public law. She makes no attempt to understand his predicament, she is not interested in it. All she wants is to penetrate his defences, and she does so, then exclaims, showing with what success she has refused to understand him,

Vous êtes empereur, Seigneur, et vous pleurez !

He recovers himself and speaks of " la patrie et la gloire ". Titus becomes pompous :

Mais, Madame, après tout, me croyez-vous indigne  
De laisser un exemple à la postérité,  
Qui sans de grands efforts ne puisse être imité ?

and Bérénice impatiently brushes aside his pose :

Non, je crois tout facile à votre barbarie.

She threatens to commit suicide, and one of her reasons for threatening to do so is the only cause of her refraining at the end and bidding such a calm, even stilted farewell.

Si devant que mourir la triste Bérénice  
Vous veut de son trépas laisser quelque vengeur,  
Je ne le cherche, ingrat, qu'au fond de votre cœur.  
Je sais que tant d'amour n'en peut être effacée.

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But soon she realizes that she does not wish to use this power, to "destroy the thing she loves", with the punishment of remorse and guilt.

Titus has been moved to the point of exclaiming to Paulin :

Allons, Rome en dira ce qu'elle en voudra dire.

But the next moment he retracts : " Je ne sais ce que je dis ". He sighs : Ah, Rome ! ah, Bérénice ! but when Antiochus, as self-forgetful as ever, begs him to return to Bérénice who is overcome with grief, he obeys instead a messenger from the senate. This choice foreshadows the final choice made in Act V, but Titus is not aware that he has chosen. He says :

J'espère à mon retour

Qu'elle ne pourra plus douter de mon amour,

but afterwards confesses that he had no definite intention.

The fifth act opens to show Antiochus " ce prince trop fidèle " fearful of hope when he hears that Bérénice is leaving Rome in anger :

Et mon cœur, prévenu d'une crainte importune,

Croit même, en espérant, irriter la fortune.

Titus enters and removes the possibility of hope. He has come to prove his love. His egoism is apparent even in his expression of concern for others. Antiochus feels that fate has been able to fool him once again in the same old way and determines that it shall be the last time.

When Titus and Bérénice meet, their positions are at first reversed. He had wanted her to go quickly, to have done with the moment of parting, and she had forced him to endure it. Now she has withdrawn into herself and has nothing more to say to him. Is not this what he desires ? She is going. Nothing else need concern him :

N'êtes-vous pas content ? Je ne veux plus vous voir.

Titus does not understand. Is the matter no longer in his

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hands? It is now he who pleads with her. Titus should not have set a time-limit for Bérénice :

C'en est fait. Vous voulez que je parte demain ;  
Et moi, j'ai résolu de partir tout à l'heure ;  
Et je pars.

Now she hears what she had tried in vain to make him say :

Demeurez,

and is betrayed into the argument she had avoided. She is hurt by the rejoicing that the rumour of her departure has caused. Titus will not have her go in anger, or too willingly. He is suffering a great deal ; she must go in a mood that will add as little as possible to his distress and, except for one line, he may be said to dictate the words of her farewell. She accepts the attitude he offered her in Act IV. She had thought of suicide as a form of revenge as well as an escape. She would escape the pang of turning from what she considers the goal of her life by doing it resentfully. Keyed to the limit of endurance, she is reasonableness outraged as she says :

Vous m'aimez, vous me le soutenez ;  
Et cependant je pars, et vous me l'ordonnez !

Ah, cruel ! par pitié, montrez-moi moins d'amour.  
Ne me rappelez point une trop chère idée,  
Et laissez-moi du moins partir persuadée  
Que déjà de votre âme exilée en secret,  
J'abandonne un ingrat qui me perd sans regret.

But she is not allowed to minimize her loss in this way. She makes no other attempt to escape the farewell that lies before her, and except for one word does not speak again until she makes it.

Titus has taken from her a letter, which after the first performance of the play Racine learnt not to have read aloud, and discovers her intention of committing suicide. He refuses to let

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her take leave of him and desires Antiochus to come to them. Titus has not yet publicly committed himself to any course. He tells Bérénice :

Rome de votre sort est encore incertaine.

Je suis venu vers vous sans savoir mon dessein :  
Mon amour m'entraînoit ; et je venois peut-être  
Pour me chercher moi-même, et pour me reconnaître.

He has found a solution. She is not to think that he will marry her. Still less will he abdicate on her account. He is grieved at the necessity of renouncing her, but if he renounces the empire, the future appears more intolerable still. He can contemplate living without her but not without the empire. She will not console him for it and he will feel unworthy of her :

Oui, Madame ; et je dois moins encore vous dire  
Que je suis prêt pour vous d'abandonner l'Empire,  
De vous suivre, et d'aller, trop content de mes fers,  
Soupirer avec vous au bout de l'univers.  
Vous même rougiriez de ma lâche conduite :  
Vous verriez à regret marcher à votre suite  
Un indigne empereur, sans empire, sans cour,  
Vil spectacle aux humains des foiblesses d'amour.

He makes a counter-threat. If she persists in threatening to commit suicide on his account he will take the same course. He pronounces his most intelligent line :

Vous voilà de mes jours maintenant responsable.

Whether or not Bérénice believes that his life depends on her, it must be clear that his peace of mind certainly does.

Antiochus's confession to Titus is caused by a misunderstanding of the situation. It reveals nothing new in the character of Antiochus but it forces Bérénice to consider Antiochus sympathetically for the first time and herself impersonally. She had always thought of herself in relation to happiness. When she ceases to do so she loses significance in her own eyes. All this

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agony is only love in despair, akin to what Antiochus feels, and Bérénice says :

et je n'entends parler  
Que de trouble, d'horreurs, de sang prêt à couler.

She no longer tries to think that, like Antiochus, she was not loved in return. In Racine individuality is a real thing, one person cannot be replaced by another. Love is a greater expenditure of spirit than is usual, the self cannot be retrieved from what it loves. Titus, like Bérénice, will not love again. He has sacrificed a weaker tendency in his nature to a stronger one and there is still something he desires. Titus is left free to rule, his conscience unburdened, with a distinct sense of his own heroism. She does not make his choice bitter to him as she had wished to do. She has realized her value to him. Tears are enough ; she does not require his blood. She had thought he failed to realize the strength of his own love, and now, not without irony, she says :

Bérénice, Seigneur, ne vaut point tant d'alarmes.

Love cannot take first place in the nature of the man who could win Bérénice's love. Her restraint when she realizes it, is the greatest mark of her love. It is " *par un dernier effort couronner tout le reste*". Hermione dies in the confusion of pain, but Phèdre goes out soberly, as Bérénice goes. She may quit life more easily than she can bring her self to say :

Pour la dernière fois, adieu, Seigneur.

## Bajazet

1672

THE next play, *Bajazet*, is different from *Bérénice* in almost every way. It follows *Bérénice* at an interval of two years, whereas *Andromaque*, *Les Plaideurs*, *Britannicus* and *Bérénice* are separated only by a year. *Bérénice* is a play with the minimum of external events, a study of a constantly changing human relationship. *Bajazet* is a bloodthirsty race against time. External events dispose of the characters in the play to an extent unusual in Racine. By the end of the play all the main characters are killed except Acomat, the imperturbable manipulator of passions who brings about a situation that he cannot control and sails away from it in a ship he keeps ready for the purpose. The plot of *Bajazet*, like that of other seventeenth-century French tragedies before it, is taken from modern history. Racine had pointed out in the preface to *Bérénice* that the "tristesse majestueuse" of tragedy was not dependent on bloodshed. In *Bajazet* he demonstrates the dramatic value of sudden and violent death, and maintains in the preface that distance in space can as efficiently as distance in time prevent the audience from looking too familiarly upon the tragic actors.

In *Bajazet* death is the most formative part of the environment. The assumption that it may strike at any moment colours every act, increasing the urgency but not the significance of life. The scene is laid in Turkey, whose growing importance had long attracted French attention. Racine mentions his main sources in the first preface to *Bajazet*. He makes changes in the story



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which he does not consider it necessary to specify, but takes great care to change nothing in the portrayal of Turkish manners and customs. The death of Bajazet brings into play the whole precarious organization of the society which permitted it to occur in that manner. Bajazet's death is ordered by his brother, Sultan Amurat, who took Bagdad in 1638. Racine describes Amurat as absent on this expedition throughout the action of the play, which takes place in his seraglio in Constantinople. Amurat's life is made to depend on his success in this enterprise. Two of his brothers have reigned before him ; the janissaries cut short the life of one, and he of the other. Amurat does not fear his dull-witted brother Ibrahim — whose son had come to the throne when Racine produced the play — but considers the high-spirited and popular Bajazet a great danger.

The exposition of *Bajazet*, the most complicated of Racine's plays, is invariably admired. The vizier Acomat invites Osmin, newly returned from the besieging army, to impart his view of the situation, but Osmin first requires an explanation, which is skilfully withheld, of Acomat's temerity in approaching the harem of the seraglio, an offence which would ordinarily have cost him his life. When Osmin left Amurat's army, Bagdad was still withstanding it and a Persian army was advancing to her aid. But Acomat must remember that news travels as slowly as the messenger and Osmin has been long on the road. Everything may have changed since he left. Acomat has seldom anything more solid than conjecture on which to base his plans. It is not only with the fortunes of war that he must reckon but also with the necessity of reading "dans le secret des cœurs". It is only his plan of escape that does not miscarry. He tries to gauge Amurat's popularity with the army. Amurat had antagonized his guard by the desire to reduce their number and by depriving them of the leadership of Acomat. Now he tries in vain to still their fear of him by hiding his own fear of them. Acomat wonders whether he can count on their loyalty and is told that

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their obedience to Amurat depends on the result of battle. Jealous for military glory, they will repay him for a victory with servile obedience and will accept defeat as fate's permission to revolt. It was rumoured among the army that Amurat had sent home a slave to demand that Bajazet be killed. Acomat reassures his kind friend. A slave had indeed been sent, and quietly disposed of on arrival :

Cet esclave n'est plus. Un ordre, cher Osmin,  
L'a fait précipiter dans le fond de l'Euxin.

Acomat, feeling that the Sultan has detached him from the army as a preliminary to killing him when he is less popular, has prepared a revolt in Constantinople. Osmin is not surprised that Bajazet, whose life, like Acomat's, is forfeit in any case, should rebel, but he exclaims at the name of Roxane, whom Amurat had honoured above all the beautiful women chosen from two continents for his harem, by crowning her Sultana, against the custom of the land, before she had borne a son. It is only because Amurat has no son that he has not already killed Bajazet. He had given Roxane authority to do so during his absence on the slightest suspicion. But Acomat has aroused passionate curiosity in the Sultana about the young man over whom she has power of life and death, whom she has never seen although he is so near, and who deserves a better fate. By bribery and a false rumour Acomat contrives a meeting and Roxane falls in love :

Bajazet est aimable. Il vit que son salut  
Dépendoit de lui plaire, et bientôt il lui plut.

The slaves are bound to silence, having failed in their duty once by allowing their charges to escape them. But they do not realize the extent of their treachery to the Sultan and the surreptitiousness of the harem deceives even Acomat and defeats its own ends. Acomat uses Atalide, the Sultan's cousin, as a shield for the love he supposes to exist between Roxane and Bajazet. She carries messages to and from Bajazet for Roxane, and the

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slaves are led to believe that Bajazet and Atalide love each other, as indeed they have done from childhood. Atalide has allowed Acomat to believe that she will marry him. It is not, he explains with some indignation, because he loves her that he wishes to marry her :

Voudrois-tu qu'à mon âge  
Je fisse de l'amour le vil apprentissage ?

But her royal blood may give him greater security under the new despot whose ingratitude and suspicion he takes for granted. It is for the ignorant multitude to accept death reverently at the Sultan's hand, and for him to take precautions. He is telling how a slave leads him " par un chemin obscur " to Roxane when she appears.

He impresses upon her the importance of immediate action and enlarges on their chances of success. The priests have been bought over and they can be trusted to lead the populace :

Pour moi, j'ai su déjà par mes brigues secrètes  
Gagner de notre loi les sacrés interprètes :  
Je sais combien crédule en sa dévotion  
Le peuple suit le frein de la religion.

Roxane accepts all his assurances but gives only a conditional one in return. She can decide nothing until she is convinced of Bajazet's love. Atalide tries in vain to deceive her but Roxane demands proof. Roxane is the only woman in Racine's plays who is in a servile position, in spite of her momentary power. She is in love for the first time and prepared to treat Bajazet as she has been treated. She is exacting in love and observes that Bajazet is less fervent than Atalide's speeches would lead her to believe :

L'ingrat ne parle pas comme on le fait parler ?

He must prove his love by marrying her, although it is no longer customary for the Sultan to marry. She tells Atalide of her resentment of Turkish customs. Amurat has not deigned to

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marry her and has inspired neither affection nor gratitude in her, but she does not pretend that this is the reason for her treachery :

Toutefois que sert-il de me justifier ?  
Bajazet, il est vrai, m'a tout fait oublier.

It has been said that Roxane uses power like a slave. It is in her use of power that the grossness of her love appears. She is willing to requisition it. Roxane desires power and security as Acomat does. Only utter lack of intelligence could prevent her from being suspicious. She is willing to delegate her power, but not without a guarantee. But she is demanding a guarantee of love. Quite unabashed, she makes her terms, less dismayed than Pyrrhus or Mithridate to feel it necessary :

Quand je fais tout pour lui, s'il ne fait tout pour moi :  
Dès le même moment, sans songer si je l'aime,  
Sans consulter enfin si je me perds moi-même,  
J'abandonne l'ingrat, et le laisse rentrer  
Dans l'état malheureux d'où je l'ai su tirer.

Acomat has allowed her to consider him a mere tool and Roxane is buoyant with the sense of power. Atalide's services can be dispensed with now. Roxane will ascertain for herself whether Bajazet desires the love he has won. She orders that he be brought to her secretly and unprepared for the interrogation on which his life depends.

Atalide, an intermediary whose function is completely different from that of Antiochus, is in despair. She must choose between two hateful wishes and declares :

Mon unique espérance est dans mon désespoir.

Her lover must marry Roxane or die. She had hoped to deceive Roxane until Bajazet was in power. Her love, too, has been conditioned by the seraglio and she thinks of it in terms of competition. She is incapable of one of Bérénice's phrases. She is not less suspicious than Roxane, she too requires proof. She

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would be truthful if it were possible, but could she "perdre mon amant pour la désabuser" ? And if Bajazet received Roxane's welcome politely ; "pouvoit-il faire moins ?" The fault lies in Roxane's credulity. Yet she suspects Bajazet of valuing the empire more than her love. The situation presents a contrast to that treated in *Bérénice* in every possible way. The rare completeness of *Bérénice's* love remains unparalleled in Racine. In *Atalide* a different mood is studied. She is devoted and capable of sacrifice but not of trust. Her love is tested by jealousy, for which there is no room in *Bérénice*, where in spite of *Bérénice's* cry,

Si Titus est jaloux, Titus est amoureux.

Titus is sure of *Bérénice's* love.

In the second act Roxane offers Bajazet the empire on the conditions made clear in the first act. She has the palace slaves in her power. He has only to marry her and he may go free :

Dans le champ glorieux que j'ai su vous ouvrir,

and take his brother's place in the traditional way. Bajazet protests against marriage and she recalls the origin of this prejudice and reminds him that there is precedent for overcoming it. Bajazet endeavours to temporize but she replies with an irony that breaks into the first of her blatant threats :

Je vous entends, Seigneur ; je vois mon imprudence ;  
Je vois que rien n'échappe à votre prévoyance.  
Vous avez pressenti jusqu'au moindre danger  
Où mon amour trop prompt vous alloit engager.  
Pour vous, pour votre honneur, vous en craignez les suites,  
Et je le crois, Seigneur, puisque vous me le dites.  
Mais avez-vous prévu, si vous ne m'épousez,  
Les périls plus certains où vous vous exposez ?  
Songez-vous que sans moi tout vous devient contraire ?  
Que c'est à moi surtout qu'il importe de plaire ?  
Songez-vous que je tiens les portes du Palais,  
Que je puis vous l'ouvrir ou fermer pour jamais,

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Que j'ai sur votre vie un empire suprême,  
Que vous ne respirez qu'autant que je vous aime ?  
Et sans ce même amour, qu'offensent vos refus,  
Songez-vous, en un mot, que vous ne seriez plus ?

Roxane is new to power and to love. She meets her first obstacle in Bajazet and the second in herself. She will kill him and reinstate herself in his brother's affections :

N'en doute point, j'y cours, et dès ce moment même.  
Bajazet, écoutez : je sens que je vous aime.

Bajazet remains unmoved and again she has that startling conjunction of moods, usually a little separated in time, as in Hermione's case. She will destroy what she loves, realizing that she loves it. It is to this act that her soul is keyed in the last hours of her life. All her power is only power to kill. She is forced to suffer from its inadequacy to the greatest extent of which she is capable before she uses it and, still unappeased, tries to eke it out in a refinement of cruelty which is cut short by her appalling death. Roxane's love does not permit sustained irony or guile, and the indifference with which she lays them down and lets her love glare out in its entirety compels a sort of awe. In one line she expresses the profundity of love with an ease worthy of Bérénice and in the next displays her ruthlessness unimpaired. Bajazet has agreed that his death may enable her to take her old place in Amurat's affections and she replies :

Dans son cœur ? Ah ! crois-tu, quand il le voudroit bien,  
Que si je perds l'espoir de régner dans le tien,  
D'une si douce erreur si longtemps possédée,  
Je puisse désormais souffrir une autre idée,  
Ni que je vive enfin, si je ne vis pour toi ?  
Je te donne, cruel, des armes contre moi,  
Sans doute, et je devois retenir ma faiblesse :  
Tu vas en triompher. Oui, je te le confesse,  
J'affectois à tes yeux une fausse fierté.  
De toi dépend ma joie et ma félicité.  
De ma sanglante mort ta mort sera suivie.

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He hesitates to speak and she tries to drag the words from him :

Quoi donc ? Que dites-vous ? et que viens-je d'entendre ?  
Vous avez des secrets que je ne puis apprendre !  
Quoi ? de vos sentiments je ne puis m'éclaircir ?

The intolerable possessiveness of Roxane drives Bajazet to a firm refusal and she calls upon her slaves to appear and desires everything to be once more as Amurat had ordered it.

It is Acomat who comes and not the slaves, and Roxane allows her orders to be ignored in the hope, no doubt, that Bajazet may be persuaded to repent. Acomat fails with distinction to overcome Bajazet's scruples. Acomat's bland egoism is as insistent as the clamour of Roxane's :

La plus sainte des lois, ah ! c'est de vous sauver,  
he assures the prince, who is Racinian enough to declare :

La mort n'est point pour moi le comble des disgrâces.

He will not win freedom by marrying Roxane. Let Acomat's supporters fight their way into the seraglio and he will protect himself until they come. But Acomat hates unnecessary risks. Roxane needs only a moment to have Bajazet put to death and thus to burden his friends with "un crime infructueux". Acomat suggests a more pleasing alternative. Bajazet need not marry Roxane, he need only promise to marry her. Bajazet's refusal to adopt a measure upon which the welfare of a state has long depended, nearly overcomes the vizier's calm :

Et d'un trône si saint la moitié n'est fondée  
Que sur la foi promise et rarement gardée.  
Je m'emporte, Seigneur. . . .

Atalide appears next to stress the growing peril. Roxane has not yet enforced her orders but she is continuing to make them known. At first Bajazet refuses to profit by the time she is giving him for reflection, and, making a nice distinction, tells Atalide :

Le ciel punit ma feinte, et confond votre adresse.

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He regrets the subterfuge of which he has been guilty and they engage in a combat of generosity in which each unwillingly accepts the greatest sacrifice the other can make. Bajazet is willing to mislead Roxane but not to lie to her. He contrasts the nobility of Atalide with the baseness of Roxane :

J'épouserois, et qui (s'il faut que je le die) ?  
Une esclave attachée à ses seuls intérêts,  
Qui présente à mes yeux les supplices tout prêts,  
Qui m'offre ou son hymen, ou la mort infaillible.

Urged by Atalide he agrees to further deception, convinced that it can only add disgrace to death, and she, already jealous of Roxane, refuses to put words of courtship in his mouth when he appeals to her for help.

In the interval between Acts II and III Roxane is again deceived, so that when she kills, it is with an accumulation of vindictiveness to which killing seems too kind and Atalide is given the opportunity of incurring responsibility for her lover's death. Atalide's suspicions slip imperceptibly past the guard of her better feelings until at last one part of her mind harangues the other in the Cornelian fashion. She had instructed Bajazet :

Dites . . . tout ce qu'il faut, Seigneur, pour vous sauver  
and now she inquires first "quel charme", then "quel engagement", and finally even whether it could be even "quelque gage infaillible". Like Bajazet she declares that death is not the greatest of ills ; but she meets it under the hardest circumstances. She declares, as Bérénice had not seen fit to do :

J'aime assez mon amant pour renoncer à lui,  
and is forced to realize that this is not so. Bérénice does not renounce her lover, she loses him to his career and renounces escapism and revolt lest she should injure it. She could go with less regret if she went in anger or feeling his love already lost.

Atalide's jealousy is prolonged by Acomat's ability to describe. He is a talented observer retaining what he has seen in



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a series of clear-cut images that have the economy and precision of a cameo and sometimes a false immobility as well. His detachment sometimes misleads him into believing his unnaturally neat arrangements acceptable to life. The strangest suitor in Racine, he warns Atalide :

N'attendez point de moi ces doux emportements,  
Tels que j'en vois paroître au cœur de ces amants.

But he has observed them ill. Atalide waves aside a definition of the attentions he considers "plus dignes de mon âge" and he gives his sketch of what has happened. As, having salvaged what goods he could, he left the palace for the ship ever-ready to receive him, in his heart :

Querellant les amants, l'amour et la fortune,  
these unmanageable things recall him. The gate of the seraglio is opened again before him and a slave appears :

Qui m'a conduit sans bruit dans un appartement  
Où Roxane attentive écoutoit son amant.

Everything is still, silent, and for Atalide, listening, unbearably significant. At last they move, and the slight gesture with which they express their love breaks the spell, and they observe Acomat. Roxane orders him to prepare the people for the coronation of Bajazet and he is on his way to do so.

Atalide's jealousy is now given free rein. She has the deprecating reasonableness of jealousy. She will concede this and this but she cannot forget the last injury, the tormenting image Acomat has left with her :

Non, vois-tu, je le nîrois en vain.  
Je ne prends point plaisir à croître ma misère.  
Je sais pour se sauver tout ce qu'il a dû faire.  
Quand mes pleurs vers Roxane ont rappelé ses pas,  
Je n'ai point prétendu qu'il ne m'obéît pas.  
Mais après les adieux que je venois d'entendre,  
Après tous les transports d'une douleur si tendre,  
Je sais qu'il n'a point dû lui faire remarquer  
La joie et les transports qu'on vient de m'expliquer.

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Bajazet enters, unwarily confessing his joy at being armed and free, before once again protesting his faithfulness. In reply Atalide, absorbing death itself into her scheme of possessive love, outdoes Eriphile in jealousy as she assigns Roxane a portion in the mind of Bajazet :

Vous pouviez l'assurer de la foi conjugale ;  
Mais vous n'auriez pas joint à ce titre d'époux  
Tous ces gages d'amour qu'elle a reçus de vous.  
Roxane s'estimoit assez récompensée,  
Et j'aurois en mourant cette douce pensée  
Que vous ayant moi-même imposé cette loi,  
Je vous ai vers Roxane envoyé plein de moi ;  
Qu'emportant chez les morts toute votre tendresse,  
Ce n'est point un amant en vous que je lui laisse.

Bajazet describes, to no avail, the disconcerting ease with which Roxane had capitulated as soon as he began to speak. Perhaps the urgency of the hour persuaded her. She seemed to mistake his embarrassment for an excess of love. Feeling incapable of the circumspection necessary to content both of them, he determines to tell Roxane the truth and Atalide has barely time to protest when the Sultana enters, naively triumphant. The slaves she offers him as his first subjects, the complacency with which she shows her moods to govern his fate :

J'ai cru dans son désordre entrevoir sa tendresse :  
J'ai prononcé sa grâce, et je crois sa promesse,

are almost enough in themselves to provoke his chilling acknowledgment.

Bajazet withdraws, and Roxane, having hoped too readily, is as swift to realize it. With a cry she turns to Atalide who has been talking to him. What were they saying ? Atalide lies with a zeal that makes Roxane reflect and for a moment her grim irony returns :

Il y va de sa vie au moins que je le croie  
and

Ce jour me jette aussi dans quelque inquiétude.

When Roxane is alone she tries, with the awful thoroughness that characterizes her, to grasp the elusive world of which she considers herself mistress and weighs probabilities and expressions of the eye to no avail until a sudden image of herself flashes before her, resolving the problem. She knows the extent of her power before she uses it, in despair that it is no greater. All that she can learn from self-knowledge is suspicion of others and added skill in the pursuit of her ends. Nowhere in Racine is there a heartier acceptance of self, less disturbed by pity or pride, than in Roxane :

Et pourquoi dans son cœur redouter Atalide ?  
 Quel seroit son dessein ? Qu'a-t-elle fait pour lui ?  
 Qui de nous deux enfin le couronne aujourd'hui ?  
 Mais, hélas ! de l'amour ignorons-nous l'empire ?  
 Si par quelque autre charme Atalide l'attire,  
 Qu'importe qu'il nous doive et le sceptre et le jour ?  
 Les bienfaits dans un cœur balancent-ils l'amour ?  
 Et sans chercher plus loin, quand l'ingrat me sut plaire,  
 Ai-je mieux reconnu les bontés de son frère ?

In the last scene of Act III the arrival of Orcan, a slave,

Né sous le ciel brûlant des plus noirs Africains,

is announced. He has been dispatched from the army with the Sultan's orders for Roxane and is received by the seraglio with profound respect. He desires to see Roxane at once, but her slave Zatime has thought it advisable to warn her mistress first. Orcan does not appear on the stage. His name strikes a general terror which is justified before the end of the play. His arrival increases the urgency of the last two acts a hundred-fold. Roxane supposes that Orcan bears another order for Bajazet's death but still considers herself mistress of the situation :

Tout m'obéit ici. Mais dois-je le défendre ?

She has even less time than she had thought but nothing else is altered as yet.

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In Act IV Atalide receives a letter from Bajazet, who is no longer free, promising that he will try to conciliate Roxane but will never offer her the love he feels only for Atalide. She, never content, exclaims : " Croit-il que je l'ignore ? " and is willing to remove the restrictions she had so jealously laid down.

Que sa bouche, ses yeux, tout l'assure qu'il l'aime.  
Qu'elle le croie enfin.

Remembering Roxane's threat, she would have him express all the love she feels for him to her rival.

At this point Roxane enters with instructions from Amurat and with cruel delay informs Atalide of what she has learnt. Amurat is victorious and is speedily returning home. Roxane hands Atalide Bajazet's death-warrant and Atalide faints when Roxane expresses her intention of executing it.

Roxane's suspicions are now confirmed. Although Atalide must lose Bajazet she is yet enviable :

Ce n'est que pour ses jours qu'elle est épouvantée.

But perhaps Atalide too has been deceived. She will set a trap for Bajazet and make sure. But she fears the thought of being undeceived and finds excuses for not risking it :

J'irai faire à mes yeux éclater ses mépris ?  
Lui-même il peut prévoir et tromper mon adresse.  
D'ailleurs, l'ordre, l'esclave, et le Vizir me presse.

She will challenge his ingratitude by crowning him. In this way she evades the truth as long as she can, telling herself that there will be time for death when they betray her, if they dare.

But the officious hands of her slaves have discovered Bajazet's love-letter in Atalide's bosom and Roxane can no longer postpone the dreaded moment of realization and accepts it with a perverse joy :

Ah ! je respire enfin ; et ma joie est extrême  
Que le traître une fois se soit trahi lui-même.

She is relieved. At last she knows what to do. Each of her swift commands evokes the moment of Bajazet's death more vividly, and it cannot come too soon for Roxane. In vain Zatime tries to remind her of the danger that threatens her from Amurat ; Roxane's thoughts linger on her despised love :

Avec quelle insolence et quelle cruauté  
Ils se jouoient tous deux de ma crédulité !

Now she admits that she had lulled her suspicions from the beginning and sees her error with a searing clarity. But her regret is not for her lost security but for the love she had never won, and seems even now tinged with hope. She chides herself for weeping, and it is the thought of Atalide that drives her to repeat the death sentence :

Pour plaire à ta rivale, il prend soin de sa vie.  
Ah ! traître, tu mourras.

With cruel anticipation she dwells upon their agony :

Toi, Zatime, retiens ma rivale en ces lieux.  
Qu'il n'ait en expirant que ses cris pour adieux.  
Qu'elle soit cependant fidèlement servie.  
Prends soin d'elle : ma haine a besoin de sa vie.  
Ah ! si pour son amant facile à s'attendrir,  
La peur de son trépas la fit presque mourir,  
Quel surcroît de vengeance et de douceur nouvelle  
De le montrer bientôt pâle et mort devant elle,  
De voir sur cet objet ses regards arrêtés,  
Me payer les plaisirs que je leur ai prêtés !

Acomat approaches to announce that his supporters are assembled at her command and at once offers his services when she explains why she has changed her plans. But Roxane desires to accomplish Bajazet's destruction herself and sends Acomat to disperse his friends. He had no intention of obeying her and Osmin almost offends him by supposing him capable of anger or jealousy at being abandoned by Bajazet and deceived by Atalide.

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His offer to kill Bajazet is only a pretext for conspiring with him at the earliest opportunity. Although he has not seen the Sultan's letter with the hardly-veiled threat that Roxane does not pause to consider, Acomat, "vieilli sous trois Sultans", knows that Amurat will not forgive :

Et qu'une mort sanglante est l'unique traité  
Qui reste entre l'esclave et le maître irrité.

Osmin suggests flight but Acomat will not withdraw at this stage :

Par une belle chute il faut me signaler.

And there is still time. Bajazet may be saved in spite of himself. Roxane's vindictiveness reveals her love. Acomat does not believe that she will hasten to carry out her threat. Acomat will make his way through the seraglio to Bajazet, disdaining the peril of the vile slaves it shelters. Will Osmin follow him? Osmin draws himself up :

Seigneur, vous m'offensez. Si vous mourez, je meurs.

Acomat is almost sprightly as he sets out on his dangerous enterprise :

Et s'il faut que je meure,  
Mourons : moi, cher Osmin, comme un Vizir ; et toi  
Comme le favori d'un homme tel que moi.

The last act of *Bajazet* shows the destruction of nearly all the characters by the instrumentality of the forces that made them what they are. The cold horror of their last moments shows itself as the very essence of their lives. The arrival of Orcan and the theft of Bajazet's letter to Atalide accelerate events and are a form of interference characteristic of the environment in which Roxane and Atalide have learnt to exist. The letter is a materialization of the relationship between Atalide and Bajazet and she realizes it. Roxane brutally dismisses Atalide, and only when she has gone tells Zatime what has been arranged :

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Oui, tout est prêt, Zatime :  
Orcan et les muets attendent leur victime.  
Je suis pourtant toujours maîtresse de son sort.  
Je puis le retenir. Mais s'il sort, il est mort.

If Roxane does not realize her imminent peril it is not that she and the audience may be surprised but that she may be seen voluntarily to sentence Bajazet. It is not fear but a paroxysm of despair at life that precedes death in the Racinian character. There is remarkably little fear in the whole theatre of Racine. The courage and natural energy of Bajazet have been blunted by confinement, and although he is noble in a crisis and jubilant at the thought of liberty, he suffers from a vacillating will and waits for events to force him. The constant exactions of the seraglio find him wavering between what he wants and has to do. Roxane despises herself for this last attempt to sway him :

Quand même il se rendroit, peux-tu lui pardonner ?

but she does not forgo it. She renounces reproach and reproaches him in the same breath :

Malgré tout mon amour, si je n'ai pu vous plaire,  
Je n'en murmure point, quoiqu'à ne vous rien taire,  
Ce même amour peut-être et ces mêmes bienfaits  
Auroient dû suppléer à mes foibles attraits.

Bajazet's defence, in which his one thought is not to mention Atalide, forces upon Roxane the impotence which, in spite of her protestations, she cannot accept in herself : " si je n'ai pu vous plaire ", and rouses in her a brutal desire to display what power she has. She does so with an arrogance that seems to spurn her own desire :

Et que pourrois-tu faire ?  
Sans l'offre de ton cœur, par où peux-tu me plaire ?  
Quels seroient de tes vœux les inutiles fruits ?  
Ne te souvient-il plus de tout ce que je suis ?  
Maîtresse du Serrail, arbitre de ta vie,  
Et même de l'État, qu'Amurat me confie,

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Sultane, et, ce qu'en vain j'ai cru trouver en toi,  
Souveraine d'un cœur qui n'eût aimé que moi :  
Dans ce comble de gloire où je suis arrivée,  
A quel indigne honneur m'avois-tu réservée ?  
Traînerois-je en ces lieux un sort infortuné,  
Vil rebut d'un ingrat que j'aurois couronné,  
De mon rang descendue, à mille autres égale,  
Ou la première esclave enfin de ma rivale ?  
Laissons ces vains discours ; et, sans m'importuner,  
Pour la dernière fois, veux-tu vivre et régner ?  
J'ai l'ordre d'Amurat, et je puis t'y soustraire.  
Mais tu n'as qu'un moment : parle.

The fury that seethes in Roxane, and that she concentrates at last in her single word of dismissal, can yet be quelled. She desires and does not hesitate to demand the spectacle of Bajazet watching Atalide die. Bajazet, who has the qualities of a soldier and needs those of a strategist as well, refuses with contempt, then recovers himself and antagonizes her further by revealing the extent of his devotion to Atalide. He sees Roxane only as a danger ; he does not realize his vast importance to her and that in her despair and wounded pride she will be incapable of sparing him. Bajazet's complete immunity to the savage magnificence of Roxane condemns him. He makes the fatal mistake of appealing to her love for him on behalf of her rival and she silences him for ever with a word :

Sortez.

Outside the dumb slaves wait to strangle him, and while he is struggling for his life Roxane receives Atalide and listens to her long prayer on his behalf. Bajazet had assured Roxane of Atalide's innocence ; she had urged him to marry Roxane, he unwisely informs her. Now Atalide more subtly protests that it was her jealousy which restrained the expression of his love for Roxane and promises to kill herself if Roxane will forgive him. She makes an attempt to lessen as much as possible the suffering she knows her death must cause him :



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Et ne vous montrez point à son cœur éperdu  
Couverte de mon sang par vos mains répandu.

Roxane has witnessed the strength of the love from which she is excluded and of which she is made to feel the dupe and permits herself a hideous pun :

Je ne mérite pas un si grand sacrifice :  
Je me connois, Madame, et je me fais justice.  
Loin de vous séparer, je prétends aujourd'hui  
Par des nœuds <sup>1</sup> éternels vous unir avec lui.

As Atalide rises from her knees Zatime comes with the news that Acomat is taking possession of the palace. The slaves do not know whether to obey him or not and many are in flight. Roxane gives Atalide into the keeping of Zatime and rushes to suppress the rebellion. Atalide remains on the stage with Zatime who has been forbidden to tell her of Bajazet's death. Atalide is abusive for the first time :

D'une esclave barbare esclave impitoyable.

She has Bajazet's contempt for Roxane. Acomat appears, demanding Bajazet. The seraglio is in disorder and he has met no resistance, but he cannot find the prince. Then, with the suddenness of its occurrence, Roxane's death is announced. Osmin, whom Acomat had sent in another direction with half his forces, saw her die :

Oui, j'ai vu l'assassin  
Retirer son poignard tout fumant de son sein.

Orcan had grimly executed Amurat's orders to kill "l'amante après l'amant" by letting Roxane condemn Bajazet and then proceed unsuspectingly to her death almost immediately afterwards. Acomat's supporters strike Orcan down forthwith, maddened by the death of Bajazet, which Acomat and Atalide learn of only now. Osmin describes Bajazet's corpse surrounded by dead and

<sup>1</sup> Play on "nœuds", which will choke life from Bajazet and "bind" him to Atalide in death.

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dying slaves whom he had forced to accompany his departing spirit. Bajazet does what he can with an unworthy fate to the end. Osmin rounds off Bajazet's epitaph as a disciple of Acomat should :

Mais, puisque c'en est fait, Seigneur, songeons à nous.

Acomat offers Atalide a safe voyage hence. He has contrived to disorganize and overwhelm the seraglio but not to install a new ruler. Atalide accepts full responsibility for Bajazet's death, feeling :

Oui, c'est moi, cher amant, qui t'arrache la vie :

Roxane, ou le Sultan, ne te l'ont point ravie,

and although both have demanded it and it might have been exacted in any case, either by a triumphant Amurat or a stealthy and dissatisfied Roxane, it has been her role to bring it about at a particular time and place. She stabs herself and is dying when the play ends.

## Mithridate

1673

THE subject of *Mithridate* is the death of an illustrious old man in full possession of those qualities which had made him formidable to Rome for many years and at the same time a lonely tyrant in his own land. Racine says of his hero : " Il n'y a guère de nom plus connu que celui de Mithridate. Sa vie et sa mort font une partie considérable de l'histoire romaine. Et, sans compter les victoires qu'il a remportées, on peut dire que ses seules défaites ont fait presque toute la gloire de trois des plus grands capitaines de la république : c'est à savoir, de Sylla, de Lucullus, et de Pompée. . . ." Everything in his life necessary for the revelation of those qualities is included in the play. " En effet, il n'y a guère d'actions éclatantes dans la vie de Mithridate qui n'aient trouvé place dans ma tragédie. J'y ai inséré tout ce qui pouvoit mettre en jour les mœurs et les sentiments de ce prince, je veux dire sa haine violente contre les Romains, son grand courage, sa finesse, sa dissimulation, et enfin cette jalousie qui lui étoit si naturelle, et qui a tant de fois coûté la vie à ses maîtresses."

The play opens with a false rumour of the death of Mithridate. Xipharès, his devoted son, in the second line of the play, opposes that single figure to the might of Rome :

Rome en effet triomphe, et Mithridate est mort.

His death is a great undoing of achievement, here, not merely an end. Xipharès grieves at the ascending glory suddenly thrown down :

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Ainsi ce roi, qui seul a durant quarante ans  
Lassé tout ce que Rome eut de chefs importants,  
Et qui dans l'Orient balançant la fortune,  
Vengeoit de tous les rois la querelle commune,  
Meurt. . . .

To replace Mithridate in Pontus and in the vast territories he had annexed, there are his sons Pharnace and Xipharès, children of different mothers. Pharnace is a secret ally of the Romans and both he and Xipharès are in love with Monime, who was to have married Mithridate and is on that account already recognized as queen. Xipharès, after a hesitation that speaks of his long restraint, tells Arbate, the person Mithridate most nearly trusts, that he loves Monime :

Je l'aime, et ne veux plus m'en taire.

His abruptness mellows into a long confidence. He loved Monime before his father knew of her. When Mithridate saw and desired the beautiful young Greek he had not at first wished to marry her but on her refusal to become his mistress finally offered her the crown. Mithridate had entrusted this mission to Arbate, with whom Monime had returned to Nymphæa, a port on the Cimmerian Bosphorus, which Mithridate had entrusted to Arbate and where the action of the tragedy takes place. Xipharès's mother had intrigued with the Romans, and, to atone for this crime which he considers as his own, Xipharès conceals his love from Mithridate and serves him by driving back the Romans, an exploit which he recounts with the zeal and idealism characteristic of him :

L'Euxin, depuis ce temps, fut libre, et l'est encore ;  
Et des rives de Pont aux rives du Bosphore,  
Tout reconnu mon père, et ses heureux vaisseaux  
N'eurent plus d'ennemis que les vents et les eaux.

He was advancing towards the Euphrates to his father's aid when news came of his defeat and death. Then he thought of Monime and hastened to Nymphæa, remembering the many

women whom Mithridate had loved and put to death and fearing that he might have ordered that Monime was not to outlive him. But his brother Pharnace had forestalled him, and with none of Xipharès', scruples boldly offered himself in Mithridate's place. Xipharès, first taking pains to justify himself, declares his intention of opposing Pharnace and is assured of the loyalty of Arbate whom he had protected from the violence of Pharnace.

Only Monime and Bérénice and Esther among Racine's quiet women — Antigone, Andromaque, Junie, Atalide, Iphigénie, Aricie and Josabet — are not provided with a strongly contrasting feminine character as a foil. Monime, the youngest and the most courageous, is often described as Cornelian. There are certain similarities of situation between *Mithridate* and Corneille's *Nicomède*, but only superficial resemblances between the characters drawn by the two authors. Cornelian courage is usually more laborious and self-conscious ; it is an act of will ; the Cornelian character is, as a rule, cultivating a better self, or conforming to some ideal, but the loveliness of Monime's speech comes from the natural fearlessness which is the condition of her being. Esther is more dependent. Even the rare maturity of Bérénice is dependent on her love. Monime alone is almost completely fearless, and, when she desires, almost completely free. Joad has not a greater security of spirit than Monime, and in him it results in an authoritativeness almost equally impressive. Monime has no resource except in herself. She is alone in a strange land, awaiting the return of Mithridate, the oldest lover in Racine, when she hears of his death and is at the same time confronted with the difficulty of refusing his son Pharnace as a successor. She comes to Xipharès :

Seigneur, je viens à vous. Car enfin aujourd'hui,  
Si vous m'abandonnez, quel sera mon appui ?

The diffidence and candour of Monime, her great ingenuous intelligence that observes everything exactly and knows only

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the most acceptable expression, are completely revealed in her appeal. Xipharès, in nervous excitement at the opportunity of paying court to her, does so in an elaborate precious manner that, in its varying restraint, succeeds in reflecting his tenderness. Monime is allowing him to assume his love returned when Pharnace enters and sweeps aside their delicate allusiveness with his brusque demands. He has the ruthlessness and cunning of his father and a love of greatness that in Xipharès takes the form of loyalty and in him is a wild and treacherous thing that yet has a larger share of Mithridate's vision and can find a mighty phrase for its ambition. He bids Monime sail with him :

Prêts à vous recevoir, mes vaisseaux vous attendent,  
Et du pied de l'autel vous y pouvez monter,  
Souveraine des mers qui vous doivent porter.

Monime requests permission to speak openly, and replies to the billowing harmony that closes his address in sentences lit with grace, supple and swift and unemphatic :

Je crois que je vous suis connue.  
Éphèse est mon pays ; mais je suis descendue  
D'aïeux, ou rois, Seigneur, ou héros, qu'autrefois  
Leur vertu, chez les Grecs, mit au-dessus des rois.  
Mithridate me vit. Éphèse, et l'Ionie,  
A son heureux empire étoit alors unie.  
Il daigna m'envoyer ce gage de sa foi.  
Ce fut pour ma famille une suprême loi.

But her father was, on this account, the first victim of the victorious Romans :

Et c'est de quoi, Seigneur, j'ai voulu vous parler.  
Quelque juste fureur dont je sois animée,  
Je ne puis point à Rome opposer une armée ;  
Inutile témoin de tous ses attentats,  
Je n'ai pour me venger ni sceptre ni soldats ;  
Enfin, je n'ai qu'un cœur. Tout ce que je puis faire,  
C'est de garder la foi que je dois à mon père,  
De ne point dans son sang aller tremper mes mains  
En épousant en vous l'allié des Romains.

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Pharnace will not admit that he is an ally of Rome and Monime proves it beyond possibility of argument. Then he defends himself by referring to those "secrets sentiments" which she asked leave to express openly and is withholding, for it is not only love of a father that dictates her refusal to marry him. Xipharès replies instead of Monime and reminds his brother that Mithridate may still lie unburied while he thinks of a festival and that they should unite to avenge him. Pharnace ignores Xipharès and again addresses Monime, for whom Xipharès once more replies. The brothers are entering upon a blunt almost juvenile wrangle that has a little in common with the quarrel between Néron and Britannicus when they are interrupted by news of their father's arrival. Xipharès and Monime retract their half-made promises with a word. Pharnace cries out on his ill-luck and fears that the Roman aid he is expecting will arrive too late. He turns to Xipharès and suggests an alliance against Mithridate, having first reminded him of the ways of that resilient spirit :

Plus il est malheureux, plus il est redoutable.

He has killed two of his sons already on slighter provocation than he has now. Monime too is in danger :

Je la plains d'autant plus que Mithridate l'aime.

Xipharès remains loyal to his father and Pharnace warns him against the sinister tenderness of Mithridate which is a cloak for suspicion and, having failed to win his brother over, bargains for his silence.

In Act II it appears that Monime has loved Xipharès since she first saw him and has refrained with difficulty from saying so openly. She feels incapable of greeting Mithridate in her present state of mind and withdraws. Mithridate has one of the most incisive entries in all the plays. His terseness, his darting implications, win an apprehensive attention for the coming word. He dismisses his sons and addresses himself to Arbate. His

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indestructible pride measures the greatness of the defeat of Mithridate :

Enfin, après un an, tu me revois, Arbate,  
Non plus, comme autrefois, cet heureux Mithridate  
Qui de Rome toujours balançant le destin,  
Tenois entre elle et moi l'univers incertain.  
Je suis vaincu.

He describes the horror of the battle by night :

Les cris que les rochers renvoyoient plus affreux,  
Enfin toute l'horreur d'un combat ténébreux ;

and his flight made possible only by the rumour which he contrived to spread of his death. A harsh old warrior who describes his nature thus :

Ce cœur nourri de sang, et de guerre affamé,  
*he cannot shake himself free of the thought of Monime.* He suspects both his sons but is willing to differentiate between them, and in the case of Xipharès to suspend judgment for the moment. Then with a feverish haste he demands to be told everything at once, and at last calls upon Arbate to account for his own conduct. Arbate prevaricates on behalf of Xipharès and directs Mithridate's attention to Pharnace's courtship of the queen. Although he feels that he is old for love and knows that he has forced himself upon her, Mithridate is pained to be so abruptly dismissed from the world :

Traître ! sans lui donner le loisir de répandre  
Les pleurs que son amour auroit dus à ma cendre !

He asks again how Xipharès has behaved and is relieved to know that he is not betrayed by his favourite son and strongest supporter.

When Monime enters and replies to his courtly greeting and request for an immediate marriage with a promise of obedience and no word of love, he rebukes her for her coldness :

Ansï, prête à subir un joug qui vous opprime,  
Vous n'allez à l'autel que comme une victime ;



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Et moi, tyran d'un cœur qui se refuse au mien,  
Même en vous possédant je ne vous devrai rien.

The calamity of old age fallen in love he had mentioned to Arbate, but to Monime he displays the magnitude of the external disasters which leave Mithridate great :

Mes malheurs, en un mot, me font-ils mépriser ?  
Ah ! pour tenter encor de nouvelles conquêtes,  
Quand je ne verrois pas des routes toutes prêtes,  
Quand le sort ennemi m'auroit jeté plus bas,  
Vaincu, persécuté, sans secours, sans États,  
Errant de mers en mers, et moins roi que pirate,  
Conservant pour tous biens le nom de Mithridate,  
Apprenez que suivi d'un nom si glorieux,  
Partout de l'univers j'attacherois les yeux ;  
Et qu'il n'est point de rois, s'ils sont dignes de l'être,  
Qui, sur le trône assis, n'enviassent peut-être  
Au-dessus de leur gloire un naufrage élevé,  
Que Rome et quarante ans ont à peine achevé.

His greatness is within. He deserves more than obedience. She owes him encouragement in defeat. But there is no response to any of his appeals and he sees that Monime has difficulty not to weep. She answers him as calmly as before and he rejects her words grimly and almost one by one. He says that her tears are for his son and orders Xipharès to be called. Monime exclaims in alarm and Mithridate unwittingly reassures her. It is Pharnace whom he suspects and he is going to give Monime into the keeping of Xipharès.

The fifth scene of Act II is very like certain scenes in Molière. Here is an old man in love confiding in his successful rival and asking him to guard and remonstrate with the young girl they both love. He storms, and hears his own words as little as Molière's lovers in despair :

Venez, mon fils, venez, votre père est trahi.  
Un fils audacieux insulte à ma ruine,  
Traverse mes desseins, m'outrage, m'assassine,  
Aime la Reine enfin. . . .

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But the events in Molière are light-hearted and leave the pitiful beings who cause them looking wry rather than tragic. Many of his comic figures are oddities that the general course of life mocks at and outruns while they shake a fist at it and are stranded in a corner. Racine has created a terrible old man with passions instead of manias, not taking defensive measures against life but still besieging it and to be parted from it only with a wrench. Racine wants the young lovers to meet again and uses the momentary blindness caused by Mithridate's anger to this end. In Molière a situation of this sort is fully exploited and serves to display the general inadequacy of the character through which it arose. But Mithridate has an immense and justifiable pride, a vigorous mind that can perceive its errors and is not deceived with impunity. There is no laughter at his expense when he leaves the young lovers together with the admonition

Qu'elle ne pousse point cette même tendresse,  
Que sais-je ? à des fureurs dont mon cœur outragé  
Ne se repentiroit qu'après s'être vengé.

Xipharès and Monime exchange confidences. He is full of blundering zeal ; she offers an example of directness and restraint that he can never follow. She is hurt and indignant that he can suspect her of affection for Pharnace :

Je le pardonne au Roi, qu'aveugle sa colère,  
Et qui de mes secrets ne peut être éclairci.  
Mais vous, Seigneur, mais vous, me traitez-vous ainsi ?

It is not enough for Xipharès to be thus singled out ; with a dozen banal questions he urges her to say that she loves him. Monime wants all her affection known but she has not the desire to talk of it that he has to hear. She chooses the quickest and most complete way possible. Her story is his own :

Et lorsque ce matin j'en écoutois le cours,  
Mon cœur vous répondoit tous vos mêmes discours.

But although her heart answers his, she is committed to Mithridate :

Je ne suis point à vous, je suis à votre père.

Their love must not make another sign ; they must avoid each other. Xipharès is again exclamatory but ready to pity Mithridate and asks how he is to be deceived. Monime says that it is for him to contrive to avoid her as other lovers contrive to meet. She leaves him swiftly with a brief all-embracing admonition and no farewell.

Mithridate addresses his two sons at length. Here and in the next act, the full force of all the characters rushes to the surface and is tried in verbal combat. In a very river of words the old unyielding mind of Mithridate shows its resources. A sudden swell of pride is controlled the moment it has served its purpose :

Le Bosphore m'a vu, par de nouveaux apprêts,  
Ramener la terreur du fond de ses marais,  
Et chassant les Romains de l'Asie étonnée,  
Renverser en un jour l'ouvrage d'une année.  
D'autres temps, d'autres soins.

Mithridate's is a reasonable pride ; he displays it constantly as the rational outcome of his deeds. He deserves confidence. Wary from day to day, suspicious of those he loves, Mithridate will trust himself to uncounted perils and assume success when the danger is too great to be measured. Precautions and delay have no part in his plan. He desires to animate a spirit of revolt against the Roman army that is pillaging the East. He is careless of time and space, or it may be even that Racine is careless, but whether Mithridate comes unpunctually to Rome or fails to reach it, the invitation so rashly given is yet one to unite the enemies of Rome. It is on his hopes of inspiring a general movement that he lays most stress. He points forward to Rome, feeling himself the urge that he would arouse :

Qu'ils tremblent, à leur tour, pour leurs propres foyers.

Brûlons ce Capitole où j'étois attendu.  
Détruisons ses honneurs, et faisons disparaître  
La honte de cent rois, et la mienne peut-être.

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Meanwhile he has not forgotten his treacherous son. Pharnace is to engage the Roman army in Asia and, in order to secure allies, must agree to marry a Parthian princess. What was enough for Mithridate's success, before time and the tide of events had turned against him, is apparent in his speech. He grows eloquent as he thinks of penetrating to the heart of the enemy, but his primary aim here is not to explain his strategy in detail so much as to feel and to show his resolution unimpaired and to test that of Pharnace. Pharnace insolently, and with all the malice of which he is capable, makes the old man's resilience and audacity appear the counsel of despair. When he speaks of his father's greatness it is to taunt him subtly and he dares to suggest that Mithridate should submit to Rome. It is Xipharès who replies with heat. Protective towards his father, the unconquerable king, he hastens to suggest a more fitting course, almost betraying his love for Monime in the process. But Mithridate does not desire protection and will not have his battles fought for him yet. He ignores what Pharnace has said and repeats his commands. Pharnace again demurs and harshly Mithridate gives his fourth command :

Et vous êtes perdu si vous me répondez.

Mithridate is hideous for a moment as the young man, treacherous but intrepid and as natural an outcome of this tyrannical champion of his country's independence as the enthusiastic Xipharès, replies, at bay :

Dussiez-vous présenter mille morts à ma vue,  
Je ne saurois chercher une fille inconnue.  
Ma vie est en vos mains.

His father springs upon him :

Ah ! c'est où je t'attends.

His despotism is never more naïve than here. He finds it natural that all wills should centre in his own, and, after the first triumphant

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words, his view gradually imposes itself. Pharnace is arrested, and, wrongly believing that his brother has betrayed him, tells Mithridate that he has a more successful rival. Mithridate assures Xipharès that he does not believe the accusation made against him, but he is tortured by doubt, and determines, justifying himself repeatedly, to lie to Monime in order to learn the truth.

He tells her that now his old age is laid bare for him to see :

Enfin j'ouvre les yeux, et je me fais justice.  
C'est faire à vos beautés un triste sacrifice,  
Que de vous présenter, Madame, avec ma foi,  
Tout l'âge et le malheur que je traîne avec moi.  
Jusqu'ici la fortune et la victoire mêmes  
Cachotent mes cheveux blancs sous trente diadèmes.

But Mithridate glitters bright in his old age, in his defeat and jealousy, even while he fails to hear the wisdom of his own words. Racine will strip him of victories to the last and show all yet secure within as he dies. His years set the seal on what he is. Were Mithridate young, his courage would be less moving and his dissimulation would seem baser were it not for the pain he suffers in pretending to renounce what must be his last love. And Monime is never younger, more direct, than in this scene.

Pourquoi, Seigneur, pourquoi voulez-vous m'éprouver ?

There is no reason for it. Is she not willing to obey ? And since to her mind there is no purpose to be served by a deception, she believes that he thinks her in love with Pharnace and is sincere in urging her to accept Xipharès instead as more worthy of her. At last, one of the few characters in Racine who are ever-mindful of their listeners' feelings, she admits that it is

Cette vivante image en qui vous vous plaisez,  
Cet ennemi de Rome, et cet autre vous-même,  
Enfin ce Xipharès que vous voulez que j'aime. . . .

But Mithridate interrupts her to ask before she has time to tell him : " Vous l'aimez ? " and exquisitely courteous, deferential

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even in her joy, Monime confesses her love, then sees his expression change, and, in spite of his false staccato assurances, wonders too late whether she has been deceived. Alone, Mithridate determines to continue his hypocrisy until he has quietly disposed of Xipharès, and so the third act ends.

The fourth act shows the result of Mithridate's trick. Monime is anxious because Xipharès has not come to her. She wonders whether the suspicions she had overcome were well-founded and blames herself for confessing so lightly to Mithridate what she had withheld so long from Xipharès. It is already clear that Mithridate has lost her by his hypocrisy. Phaedime, her confidante, stresses the unseemliness of such baseness in a king, and, like Monime, argues that he had nothing to gain by deceit since she was willing to obey him. But what Mithridate wanted then was not to be obeyed but to be undeceived, and he achieved his end. Monime is allowing herself to think of love uncensured by loyalty to Mithridate when Xipharès appears. This scene between Monime and Xipharès calls to mind the love of Antigone and Hémon, although theirs is only rapidly indicated and menaced more impersonally. Each is concerned for the safety of the other. If Xipharès does not know who has betrayed him to Mithridate it is that Monime may have the task of telling him. Mithridate is being suspiciously affectionate towards him, and Arbate has warned him. He comes in turn to warn Monime, reminding her of Mithridate's brutality towards those he had loved. But she thinks only of the harm she has done him, blaming herself for having repeatedly stifled her misgivings although his, as she remembers, was dissimulation that might well convince. She will not be comforted for all Xipharès' graceful questioning :

Mon malheur est parti d'une si belle cause ?

and he urges her to marry Mithridate. But now Monime, who had avoided mentioning Mithridate, abuses him roundly. He is "un barbare" and his love "odieux". Xipharès reminds her

of her earlier attitude ; the last time they met she had been willing to marry Mithridate. Xipharès had delicately referred to the possibility of bloodshed : “ que . . . je puisse à votre amour ne coûter que des pleurs ”, but she, outraged that his father will have made her partly responsible for her lover's death, refuses with energy “ une main de votre sang fumante ”. The obedience of Monime must always be voluntary, nothing can be exacted from her. Xipharès is wasting his time in arguing with her — she tells him so and bids him go quickly ; and let him, above all, live. It is only their life that Mithridate can threaten.

When Mithridate comes to her he finds this power inadequate. With an abruptness that would forbid argument, he summons her to the altar to make the marriage vows from which he has just granted an escape. With the shamelessness of the powerful he confuses authority and justice, but Monime, Racine's greatest exponent of the inalienable freedom of the spirit to choose a certain way of life even if it costs life, distinguishes between them and gives each its due. Old as he is, Mithridate has a new experience. He will not explain his behaviour, but Monime will not allow him to evade her opinion of it :

Quoi ? Seigneur, vous m'auriez donc trompée ?

Then, in his turn, he reproaches her with a greater treachery. With the egoism that made other people's desires and all obstacles less real to him than his will, and contributed towards his success, Mithridate blames her for receiving ungratefully the inestimable honour of his hand ; for not refusing it ; for refusing it now when he has lost so much. He lays claim to pity ; he seems prouder when he asks for it, and it is not a need. Because the perfect calm of Monime puts a spell upon him he feels magnanimous. And Mithridate is surprised, as death will not surprise him, to be so checked by her even for a moment :

Vous osez à mes yeux rappeler le passé,  
Vous m'accusez encor, quand je suis offensé.

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He tries to break through that compelling quiet with a terse brutality he never surpasses. In her reply Monime appeals to a nicety of feeling that Mithridate lacks. He does not admit the justice of her arguments, but her speech makes on him an impression for which he cannot account. If her dignified description of the inferior position from which he boasted of having raised her contains a subtle lesson for Mithridate, his reply shows that he has not profited by it. She is quite willing to pay tribute to his greatness. She was reconciled to sacrificing her happiness for that of "un héros tel que vous". For his sake she had been willing to take leave of Xipharès and he of her. Mithridate alone is responsible for the confession of love for which he has blamed her, and, though he forget it, she will never forget it, and remembering it she will never be his wife. When he advises her to think again, Monime makes explicit all the implications of the scene that has occurred between them, his attempt to intimidate, her realization of what his anger means, so grimly filling the simple "Je vous connois", the significance she attaches to her own outspokenness and the indictment, tempered by a plea for Xipharès :

Non, Seigneur, vainement vous croyez m'étonner.  
Je vous connois : je sais tout ce que je m'apprête,  
Et je vois quels malheurs j'assemble sur ma tête ;  
Mais le dessein est pris : rien ne peut m'ébranler.  
Jugez-en, puisqu'ainsi je vous ose parler,  
Et m'emporte au delà de cette modestie  
Dont jusqu'à ce moment je n'étois point sortie.  
Vous vous êtes servi de ma funeste main  
Pour mettre à votre fils un poignard dans le sein.  
De ses feux innocents j'ai trahi le mystère ;  
Et quand il n'en perdrait que l'amour de son père,  
Il en mourra, Seigneur. Ma foi ni mon amour  
Ne seront point le prix d'un si cruel détour.  
Après cela, jugez. Perdez une rebelle ;  
Armez-vous du pouvoir qu'on vous donna sur elle :  
J'attendrai mon arrêt ; vous pouvez commander.  
Tout ce qu'en vous quittant j'ose vous demander,



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Croyez (à la vertu je dois cette justice)  
Que je vous trahis seule, et n'ai point de complice ;  
Et que d'un plein succès vos vœux seroient suivis  
Si j'en croyois, Seigneur, les vœux de votre fils.

Mithridate is not concerned with Monime's feelings but he does battle with his own. He is relieved that the sense of being in the wrong vanishes soon after her withdrawal :

Elle me quitte ! Et moi, dans un lâche silence,  
Je semble de sa fuite approuver l'insolence ?  
Peu s'en faut que mon cœur, penchant de son côté,  
Ne me condamne encor de trop de cruauté ?  
Qui suis-je ? Est-ce Monime ? Et suis-je Mithridate ?  
Non, non, plus de pardon, plus d'amour pour l'ingrate.  
Ma colère revient, et je me reconnois.

He will sacrifice all three of them to his main purpose, the defeat of Rome. Then he remembers that he will not be sacrificing Xipharès to that end and, ever practical, hesitates, but not through affection :

Pourquoi répandre un sang qui m'est si nécessaire ?

It would be wiser to yield Monime to this valuable enemy of Rome. But the thought of yielding her is intolerable :

Ah ! c'est un crime encor dont je la veux punir.

Then the strange reluctance to harm her returns to bewilder him and he thinks what a triumph it would be for Rome to know her hoary enemy so entangled by his domestic affairs. He thinks of his great age which has not immunized against love :

Un cœur déjà glacé par le froid des années !

and it is in vain that he has learnt to withstand all other poisons.

Monime is his greatest love but there have been others. There has been no considerable enemy but Rome. He cannot choose in thought between Xipharès the rival and Xipharès the

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ally, and it is in the test of crisis that he chooses the ally. Arbate tells him that Pharnace has bribed his guards and spread panic among the army by revealing his father's new plan of campaign and offering them instead peace with Rome. Mithridate desires Xipharès to come to his aid but Arbate is obliged to report that he has been seen with a body of his supporters among the rebels. It is now that Mithridate determines to kill both his sons in the presence of the army. He is undaunted :

Les mutins n'oseroient soutenir ma présence.  
Je ne veux que les voir. . . .

Then Arcas announces the arrival of the Romans. In a moment they will be surrounded. Overwhelmed as he is, Mithridate remembers that his sudden misfortune means renewed hope for others and finds time to order that Monime be put to death.

The fifth act opens to show Monime endeavouring to kill herself in despair that Xipharès is dead. The king has no hope of victory and Pharnace will come to claim her. Phaëdime, revealing another of the sudden changes of situation that characterize *Mithridate*, reminds her that Xipharès had wrongly been thought to have joined the rebels and that the report of his death may be equally false. But Monime is sure that her lover is dead and is not content until she has blamed herself for it. She has tried to use as a halter the diadem that Mithridate had placed upon her head, but it breaks in her hands and she apostrophizes it for refusing her even this service.

The appearance of Mithridate's messenger, Arcas, rouses hope in Phaëdime but not in her mistress. Monime joyfully receives the poison Mithridate has sent and in return sends him thanks that he can hardly find less bitter. This is the most welcome of his gifts to her. But Monime herself is not bitter and enjoys her freest moment in this "climat barbare" now that the release of death approaches. She thinks of her native land and bids Phaëdime return to it and there tell her mistress's fate. She

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accepts as her hard fate eternal separation from Xipharès and it is to him rather than to life that she bids farewell :

Héros, avec qui, même en terminant ma vie,  
Je n'ose en un tombeau demander d'être unie.

Arbate enters precipitately and dashes the poison to the ground, ordering Arcas to hasten to tell Mithridate that he has arrived in time to do so. Monime fears that Mithridate has chosen a more terrible death for her, but again there is an unexpected development. It is the suddenness of the changes of situation in *Mithridate* that causes the reactions to them to be considered improbable and yet it is the element of surprise that intensifies horror and relief in the characters of the play and helps to explain their behaviour. *Mithridate* is a play in which external circumstances, which are manipulated for the purpose of revealing character, sometimes draw undue attention to themselves, and this is a fault. In Scene 4 of the last act it transpires that Xipharès is, after all, alive, but that Mithridate, believing the false rumour of his death and thinking defeat inevitable, had tried in vain to poison himself and then, after a noble battle, turned his sword against himself. Arbate does ample justice to the great king's last exploit :

Il parle ; et défiant leurs nombreuses cohortes,  
Du palais, à ces mots, il fait ouvrir les portes.  
A l'aspect de ce front dont la noble fureur  
Tant de fois dans leurs rangs répandit la terreur,  
Vous les eussiez vus tous, retournant en arrière,  
Laisser entre eux et nous une large carrière ;  
Et déjà quelques-uns couroient épouvantés  
Jusque dans les vaisseaux qui les ont apportés.

But Pharnace leads them on and Mithridate is at bay :

Ils vouloient tous ensemble accabler Mithridate.  
Mais lui : " C'en est assez, m'a-t-il dit, cher Arbate ;  
Le sang et la fureur m'emportent trop avant.  
Ne livrons pas surtout Mithridate vivant."

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Aussitôt dans son sein il plonge son épée.  
Mais la mort fuit encor sa grande âme trompée.  
Ce héros dans mes bras est tombé tout sanglant,  
Foible, et qui s'irritoit contre un trépas si lent ;  
Et se plaignant à moi de ce reste de vie,  
Il soulevoit encor sa main appesantie ;  
Et marquant à mon bras la place de son cœur,  
Sembloit d'un coup plus sûr implorer la faveur.

He stabs himself but that firm soul will not depart, and as he tries to drive it out the battle turns and Xipharès is seen to put the Romans to flight. He has escaped from the rebels Pharnace had set to hem him in, and hewn a path to the king, reviving loyalty in the deserters on his way. He sees his father dying and in his grief attempts to kill himself. Then Mithridate, given a great joy in his last moments, sends Arbate to see if Monime can be saved and Arbate, " tout lassé que j'étois ", ran with his last strength.

Mithridate has a magnificent death. He considers it an interruption of his glorious career rather than a catastrophe, and it is one of the least tragic deaths in Racine. He refuses pity. Pride in the day of victory ousts regret that it is the last day :

J'ai vengé l'univers autant que je l'ai pu :  
La mort dans ce projet m'a seule interrompu.  
Ennemi des Romains et de la tyrannie,  
Je n'ai point de leur joug subi l'ignominie ;  
Et j'ose me flatter qu'entre les noms fameux  
Qu'une pareille haine a signalés contre eux,  
Nul ne leur a plus fait acheter la victoire,  
Ni de jours malheureux plus rempli leur histoire.  
Le ciel n'a pas voulu qu'achevant mon dessein  
Rome en cendre me vît expirer dans son sein.  
Mais au moins quelque joie en mourant me console :  
J'expire environné d'ennemis que j'immole ;  
Dans leur sang odieux j'ai pu tremper mes mains,  
Et mes derniers regards ont vu fuir les Romains.

He had been dying in bitterness of soul at being conquered ;

thanks to Xipharès, he dies victorious. He bestows Monime on Xipharès most gracefully :

Vous seule me restez : souffrez que je vous donne.

It is said that such generosity in Mithridate is incredible. It would be incredible were it not that his swelling triumph at escaping an end that would be the annulment of his life's work dwarfs everything else, and to give Monime is not a sacrifice at this moment but a relief :

Il épargne à ma mort leur présence importune.

Que ne puis-je payer ce service important. . . .

It is the satisfaction of hatred, not love, that fills his last moments. He dies regretted and admired and consoled, although he knows that Xipharès cannot withstand the inevitable Roman reprisals. While he lived, they did not triumph long. Monime would have him live : " pour le bonheur du monde et pour sa liberté ", but Mithridate says calmly :

C'en est fait, Madame, et j'ai vécu.

He addresses himself to his son, warning him not to await the return of the Roman army or delay even to give him burial :

Tant de Romains sans vie, en cent lieux dispersés,

Suffisent à ma cendre et l'honorent assez.

He foresees the defeat of Pharnace and tells Xipharès to entrust his punishment to Rome. He dies in his son's arms, well content :

Je sens que je me meurs. Approchez-vous, mon fils.

Dans cet embrassement dont la douceur me flatte,

Venez, et recevez l'âme de Mithridate.

In *Mithridate*, as in *Britannicus* and *Bajazet*, the free spirit must live in a despotic world ; in *Phèdre* we feel the despotism of a world order rather than of a particular state. Monime is as compelling a figure as Mithridate, and her struggle as significant as his but subordinated to it, although insufficiently for complete

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unity of action. Her function in the play is to represent what is most distinctive and desirable in the world to Mithridate, so that his capacity to love is called forth to the full in old age and submerged by his strongest passion, hatred of Rome. In Titus, too, love had been dominated by a stronger passion. In Roxane love and the desire to dominate are difficult to extricate. Bérénice renounces all her power over Titus. There is always the dramatic visible spectacle brought about by the striking of mind upon mind. A weaker single force is usually overcome, and the destruction of the lonelier, more daring and individually stronger figure both wounds the mind like a lost aspiration and silences complaint by its inevitability. It is the sensation of tragedy. In *Mithridate* it is aroused but not shared by the hero, as it is shared by Oreste, Bérénice, Phèdre or Athalie. With the soul of Mithridate something great has gone from the world. It is right that it should go alone, as it lived. From a purely theatrical point of view, apart from any other, no one must share Mithridate's last great adventure.

## Iphigénie

1674

UNLIKE *Phèdre*, which followed it more than two years later, *Iphigénie* has a number of almost equally interesting characters, and a plot that creates suspense more independently of the characters than is usual. Racine declares in his preface that "le dénouement de la pièce est tiré du fond même de la pièce". He avoids sacrificing the perfectly innocent Iphigénie and does so without the aid of a *deus ex machina*. It has been thought that Racine shirked the brutality of Iphigénie's death. It is nevertheless brutality which Agamemnon her father has from time to time been willing to accept, and which he and the camp can consider the will of the gods. But in any case the sacrifice of Iphigénie would deprive the play of its tragic end. For Iphigénie, as he portrays her, it would be an heroic, a Cornelian death, for Agamemnon a bitter choice like that of Titus, who is far less tragic than Bérénice. For neither would it be utter defeat and loss of everything. For Ériphile it is a tragic death, accepted as her portion of the ancestral glory. This is all she has of the honour she desired. She inherits her parents' guilt. But Ériphile is not the main figure in the play. Her character would certainly permit of treatment as the main figure but it has not received it. Throughout the play the passions of Agamemnon, Clytemnestre and Iphigénie are treated as of more importance to the situation. Yet it is Ériphile who has the final effect on it. It is sometimes said that Calchas the priest is the main figure as the intermediary of the gods, although he does not

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appear. But it must always be said in favour of Racine as a dramatist that what the gods do is never more interesting than what man tries to do. Man is not overshadowed by his fate in Racine. He is destroyed, but he asserts himself first as a separate consciousness, and in Racine's plays the gods are of interest mainly because they have destroyed him. Certainly we are led to wonder why, but Racine is primarily a dramatist and the spectacle of conflict is never obscured by his growing interest in the cause of this terrible but fascinating thing. Calchas is very interesting but is not more interesting than Agamemnon. He serves to test Agamemnon.

In *Iphigénie*, then, the person who suffers the most tragic fate is not the main figure. Passions are most extensively shown to rage in persons who escape the consequences of them and are not affected by their decisions. They feel then, apparently, mainly that they may be seen to feel. Ériphile feels that she may incur the penalty of death. Their reactions are interdependent, to a certain extent; the passions of the main characters give Ériphile's their opportunity. But passions in a play usually appear significant in proportion to their identity with the dramatic action, and the feeling of dissatisfaction felt at the *dénouement* of *Iphigénie* is due to the fact that the main characters suddenly appear to have had only an indirect effect on it.

*Iphigénie* contains some of Racine's most wonderful poetry. When the play opens, dawn is beginning to break over the Greek army assembled at Aulis awaiting favourable winds in order to set sail for Troy. Agamemnon wakes in the silence and calls Arcas, one of his retainers. Arcas wonders if the winds have been granted them in the night and listens, but the air is still :

Mais tout dort, et l'armée, et les vents, et Neptune.

Agamemnon envies the lot of the humble and Arcas is thus given the opportunity of pointing out the good fortune of Agamemnon.

He is

Du sang de Jupiter issu de tous côtés,



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and Iphigénie his daughter is sought in marriage by Achille. Twenty kings are ready to set sail under his command. But he is, after all, only human and must bear with an occasional setback, such as this delay. But Agamemnon is weeping because the favourable winds will be granted only in return for the sacrifice of Iphigénie. They were setting out, already menacing the shores of Troy, when the wind fell and

la rame inutile

Fatigua vainement une mer immobile.

This unheard-of happening led him to make a secret offering to the goddess Diane, who answered through the mouth of the seer Calchas :

Vous armez contre Troie une puissance vaine,  
Si dans un sacrifice auguste et solennel  
Une fille du sang d'Hélène  
De Diane en ces lieux n'ensanglante l'autel.  
Pour obtenir les vents que le ciel vous dénie,  
Sacrifiez Iphigénie.

The ambiguity of the oracle in *La Thébàïde* served mainly to stress the relentlessness of fate in pursuit of the house of Œdipus. Here it is used to develop the plot. It provides a far more exciting plot in *Iphigénie*. But in *La Thébàïde* the oracle spoke with the voice of doom. In *Iphigénie* it appears rather to have set a problem of identification.

At first Agamemnon, indignant, swore to disobey the gods and wished to dismiss the assembled Greeks. But Ulysse, the wily, sympathizing with him and listening to his first outburst, reminded him of "l'honneur et la patrie". Racine does not send the Greeks to Troy only for Helen. Agamemnon is reminded of

Tout ce peuple, ces rois à mes ordres soumis,  
Et l'empire d'Asie à la Grèce promis :  
De quel front immolant tout l'État à ma fille,  
Roi sans gloire, j'irois vieillir dans ma famille !

There is not a clear division between the private and the public interest. Agamemnon is well aware that

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Ces noms de roi des rois et de chef de la Grèce,  
Chatouilloient de mon cœur l'orgueilleuse foiblesse.

Moreover the gods afflict him by night and, as Athalie is going to do, he dreams of his hopes and fears. Finally he gives way and, "vaincu par Ulysse", agrees to sacrifice his daughter. Like Oreste, Agamemnon seldom accepts responsibility for his decisions, and like him he practises deceit. He writes to Iphigénie that Achille desires to marry her before they set sail for Troy. Achille was then absent but has now returned. However, it is not fear of Achille or reluctance to sacrifice his own child that restrains him now, but the very personal bond that unites him to his daughter :

Sa jeunesse, mon sang, n'est pas ce que je plains.  
Je plains mille vertus, une amour mutuelle,  
Sa piété pour moi, ma tendresse pour elle,  
Un respect qu'en son cœur rien ne peut balancer,  
Et que j'avois promis de mieux récompenser.

Agamemnon concludes that the gods are but testing him :

Tes oracles sans doute ont voulu m'éprouver ;  
Et tu me punirois si j'osois l'achever.

They do not exact the price, but he is shown ready to pay it before the play is ended. He vacillates throughout. He sends Arcas with a letter to Iphigénie forbidding her to come to Aulis. The close of the first scene increases the tension of the plot :

Si ma fille une fois met le pied dans l'Aulide,  
Elle est morte. Calchas, qui l'attend en ces lieux,  
Fera taire nos pleurs, fera parler les Dieux ;  
Et la religion, contre nous irritée,  
Par les timides Grecs sera seule écoutée.  
Ceux même dont ma gloire aigrit l'ambition  
Réveilleront leur brigue et leur prétention,  
M'arracheront peut-être un pouvoir qui les blesse. . . .  
Va, dis-je, sauve-la de ma propre foiblesse.

Agamemnon knows his own weakness so well, he is so painfully divided against himself and so anxious that Iphigénie should not

know of his momentary willingness to sacrifice her, that he succeeds in arousing sympathy but dispels it almost at once. He understands Iphigénie far less than she understands him :

*Je leur écris qu'Achille a changé de pensée.*

He prefers Iphigénie to believe that Achille is postponing the marriage on account of affection for a young captive he had brought from Lesbos, Ériphile, who is at present in Argos with Iphigénie. Without Ériphile, Racine says, " je n'aurois jamais osé entreprendre cette tragédie ". It is in the introduction of Ériphile that he differs most from Euripides.

As day breaks, Achille and Ulysse come to Agamemnon's tent. Achille is overjoyed at the rumour he has heard of Iphigénie's expected arrival and Agamemnon is alarmed that he has heard of it. Ulysse answers for Agamemnon and tells Achille that in time of war " le chef des Grecs " has other cares than the marriage of his daughter. Achille, although like Hippolyte he has fallen in love, has retained his pride and fiery temper and answers brusquely with a challenge before he repeats his request that he may, as has been rumoured, marry Iphigénie before they sail to Troy. Agamemnon tells him that " le ciel protège Troie ", and that the army must return since winds are denied them. Achille, fearing only lest anyone else

*Au rivage troyen descendoit le premier,*

is not silenced by Agamemnon's praise of his exploits and the warning that Troy has been named as his burial-ground. Agamemnon protests that if Paris has borne away Clytemnestre's sister, the Trojans have lost another Helen in the proud young captive, from her bearing of noble birth, whom Achille has brought from Lesbos. Achille reproaches him :

*Vous lisez de trop loin dans les secrets des Dieux.*

*L'honneur parle, il suffit : ce sont là nos oracles.*

He will go to Troy at all costs.

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Ulysse, left with Agamemnon, winds his way into his listener's mind. Ulysse appeals to duty, then to fear and finally to pride. Agamemnon has promised to sacrifice his daughter and on that assurance Calchas has predicted the return of favourable winds. Calchas will not be proved wrong and his complaints will not

*Laissent mentir les Dieux sans vous en accuser ?*

It was Agamemnon who gathered together Helen's former suitors and reminded them of their oath. Kings who might well dispute it accept his authority. Now he is going to bid them go home and dares not "d'un peu de sang acheter tant de gloire". Agamemnon refuses to have the sacrifice so minimized and reminds Ulysse of his love for his own child. Having taken steps to prevent Iphigénie from coming, he tells Ulysse that he is willing to keep his word. If Iphigénie comes she shall be sacrificed, but if some kindlier fate detains her in Argos she shall be allowed to escape. He has hardly made the bargain when the arrival of his wife Clytemnestre with Iphigénie and Ériphile, who has come to consult Calchas about the mystery surrounding her birth, is announced. The queen had gone astray and wandered from the camp, in the near-by woods. It is because of this that she receives the warning letter too late. The soldiers surround the young princess, exclaiming at her beauty and wondering what brings her to the camp. All agree that the gods have conspired to bless Agamemnon. Agamemnon again bewails the hard lot of a king constrained always to hide his misfortunes and Ulysse again comforts him, warns him and paints the glorious future until its price grows blurred :

*Voyez tout l'Hellespont blanchissant sous nos rames.*

It means immortality. Agamemnon gives way in his usual fashion :

*Je cède, et laisse aux Dieux opprimer l'innocence.*

For the third time he shows his desire to keep Clytemnestre in ignorance of her daughter's fate.

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Act II introduces Ériphile. She cannot endure to see "un bonheur dont je ne puis jouir", and has lingered behind the queen and the princess. Her confidante Doris marvels that she seemed less unhappy as a prisoner on her captor's vessel than she is now that Iphigénie has befriended her and brought her to Aulide as she desired. Ériphile is envy incarnate. She is not jealous through love alone, as Phèdre is jealous, but seems to bear a universal grudge. Her lot has been hard. If she cannot bear to see Iphigénie happy in the affection of her parents, it is because she has known neither father nor mother herself, and an oracle tells her that she can discover her parentage only at the cost of her life. Doris suggests that the oracle implies only the loss of her old name in the discovery of a new one. The father of Doris, who alone knew Ériphile's true name, had perished by the hand of Achilles. Doris, the perfect confidante, seems to forget her own grief in Ériphile's :

Ah ! que perdant, Madame, un témoin si fidèle,  
La main qui vous l'ôta vous doit sembler cruelle !

She tries to console Ériphile by saying that Calchas will doubtless be able to reveal the secret of her birth and that Iphigénie has promised that the first boon she will ask of her husband will be on Ériphile's behalf. Ériphile then confesses her love for Achilles :

Dont la sanglante main m'enleva prisonnière.

Her love had its birth in cruelty and fear :

Et me voyant presser d'un bras ensanglanté,  
Je frémissais, Doris. . .

When at last she looked at her captor she loved him, seeing no cruelty in his face. She has accompanied Iphigénie not in order to consult Calchas, but in the hope of harming her friend :

Que peut-être approchant ces amants trop heureux,  
Quelqu'un de mes malheurs se répandroit sur eux.

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Iphigénie appears with Agamemnon. She is brimming with joy and detains her father, desiring to share it with him. She revels youthfully in her father's importance :

Dieux ! avec quel amour la Grèce vous révère !  
Quel bonheur de me voir la fille d'un tel père !

Agamemnon is troubled, and Iphigénie thinks that he is anxious on account of his dignity and reminds him that their only witness is Ériphile, whom she has a hundred times told of her father's kindness, and

J'ai fait gloire à ses yeux de ma félicité.

Ériphile does not speak a word. Iphigénie tries in vain to dispel her father's gloom, and he leaves her, after her inquiry about the sacrifice for which Calchas is preparing, with the grim promise

Vous y serez, ma fille.

Iphigénie seems doomed. She has a premonition of disaster and Ériphile offers her scant sympathy, resenting complaint in one so fortunate. If Agamemnon rebuffs her, there is a mother to console, and a lover. Iphigénie requires no further invitation to speak of Achilles. She has reached the point of congratulating herself that Achilles alone among all the Greeks has freely joined her father, and on her account, when Clytemnestre appears and announces that they must depart at once. Achilles wants their marriage deferred. Arcas has given Clytemnestre the letter too late. Clytemnestre, reading that Achilles desires to postpone the marriage, declares that it shall not take place at all :

Ma fille, c'est à nous de montrer qui nous sommes,

Rompons avec plaisir un hymen qu'il diffère.

She turns to Ériphile and contemptuously gives her leave to stay, since she has another protector. But Iphigénie is not willing for her to stay, and soon she accuses her directly o

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desiring to stay because of Achilles. Again Ériphile, denying it, describes her captor :

Qui toujours tout sanglant se présente à mes yeux,  
and Iphigénie in a moment of indignant realization defines the impression that Racine has slowly built up :

Et ces mêmes fureurs que vous me dépeignez,  
Ces bras que dans le sang vous avez vus baignés,  
Ces morts, cette Lesbos, ces cendres, cette flamme,  
Sont les traits dont l'amour l'a gravé dans votre âme ;  
Et loin d'en détester le cruel souvenir,  
Vous vous plaisez encore à m'en entretenir.

Ériphile replies that Achilles could hardly prefer a nameless girl to Agamemnon's daughter, who feels that Ériphile says this only to triumph over her more completely. Ériphile has mentioned Agamemnon, let her remember that

Il commande à la Grèce, il est mon père, il m'aime.

Achilles, overjoyed at seeing Iphigénie, is amazed at her curt reply and immediate withdrawal and questions Ériphile, who, instead of answering, questions him skilfully in return. But all she learns is that Achilles still loves Iphigénie and is bewildered by the strange behaviour he observes in those about him. He has increased Ériphile's jealousy and spite and her suspicion that all is not well :

Orgueilleuse rivale, on t'aime, et tu murmures ?  
Souffrirai-je à la fois ta gloire et tes injures ?

She has greater hope of harming Iphigénie :

Pour ne pas pleurer seule et mourir sans vengeance.

In Act III, instead of unexpected arrivals and delays and misunderstandings, there is the clash of wills, first between Clytemnestre and Agamemnon, then between Achilles and Iphigénie. Clytemnestre demands an explanation. They have

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been informed that Achilles wishes to postpone the marriage, yet Achilles is urging them not to delay. Agamemnon again deceives Clytemnestre. He has been misinformed ; she may send Iphigénie to the altar with Achilles. But he desires her not to accompany her daughter. Clytemnestre protests :

Dois je donc de Calchas être moins près que vous ?

Agamemnon, incidentally calling up his dread ancestry, reminds her that she is not in the palace of Atreus now ; it is unseemly for his wife to attend the wedding ceremony in this rough camp. But Clytemnestre is not easily moved from a purpose :

Où tout vous est soumis ;  
Où le sort de l'Asie en vos mains est remis ;  
Où je vois sous vos lois marcher la Grèce entière ;  
Où le fils de Thétis va m'appeler sa mère.  
Dans quel palais superbe et plein de ma grandeur  
Puis-je jamais paroître avec plus de splendeur ?

He pleads with her but she will not give way. Finally he commands her and Clytemnestre submits, thinking it a new arrogance in him, or fear because she is Helen's sister. She is consoled by the thought of Iphigénie's happiness. Clytemnestre does not defy her husband until Iphigénie's life seems in danger.

Achilles expresses his joy to Clytemnestre and to Iphigénie, who tries to make amends to Ériphile by presenting her to Achilles and gracefully requesting him to set her free. Ériphile, with veiled references to her love, asks to be spared the sight of her enemies' happiness, and Achilles grants the requests made to him. Then Arcas appears and warns them not to send Iphigénie to the altar. Racine draws out the tense moment before the secret is revealed. By about the middle of the play all the main characters are informed of the danger that threatens Iphigénie. It is now less a matter of whether it will be discovered and more one of how they will react to it. The interest is more purely psychological.



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Clytemnestre asks whether the gods can require "un meurtre abominable". Iphigénie tries to account for it: "de quoi suis-je coupable?" Arcas points out that the camp is still in ignorance of what he has just told them — Racine has reserved the means of increasing Iphigénie's peril. Clytemnestre kneels in prayer to Achilles. While she lives she will not permit the sacrifice :

Il faudra que Calchas cherche une autre victime.

Achille declares :

Madame, je me tais, et demeure immobile

and proceeds to give expression to his offended pride and love, ending: "je cours vous venger". Iphigénie detains him and he gives even freer rein to his indignation :

Et pour fruit de mes soins, pour fruit de mes travaux,  
Pour tout le prix enfin d'une illustre victoire,  
Qui le doit enrichir, venger, combler de gloire,  
Content et glorieux du nom de votre époux,  
Je ne lui demandois que l'honneur d'être à vous.

More imaginative than Agamemnon, he sees that the deception will make Iphigénie's death more cruel :

Vous iriez à l'autel me chercher vainement ;  
Et d'un fer imprévu vous tomberiez frappée,  
En accusant mon nom qui vous auroit trompée ?

He resents, as well, the undeserved stain on his honour. Iphigénie overlooks none of the terms of abuse he has used in speaking of her father :

Car enfin ce cruel, que vous allez braver,  
Cet ennemi barbare, injuste, sanguinaire,  
Songez, quoi qu'il ait fait, songez qu'il est mon père.

Achille feels that Agamemnon has forfeited the name, but Iphigénie is bound to her father by long affectionate memories which cannot be lost in a moment :

## IPHIGÉNIE

C'est mon père, Seigneur, je vous le dis encore,  
Mais un père que j'aime, un père que j'adore,  
Qui me chérit lui-même, et dont jusqu'à ce jour  
Je n'ai jamais reçu que des marques d'amour.  
Mon cœur, dans ce respect élevé dès l'enfance,  
Ne peut que s'affliger de tout ce qui l'offense.  
Et loin d'oser ici, par un prompt changement,  
Approuver la fureur de votre emportement,  
Loin que par mes discours je l'attise moi-même,  
Croyez qu'il faut aimer autant que je vous aime,  
Pour avoir pu souffrir tous les noms odieux  
Dont votre amour le vient d'outrager à mes yeux.

It is a proof of her love for Achilles that she has allowed him to speak so violently. Achilles is jealous of the greater confidence she has in her father and of her care for him :

C'est pour lui que l'on tremble, et c'est moi que l'on craint ?

Iphigénie then points out to him, and rightly, for no one else has noticed it :

De combien votre amour m'est plus cher que ma vie !

Clytemnestre returns complaining that Agamemnon refuses to see her and Achilles starts out : " Il me verra, Madame ", but is again deterred by Iphigénie. She begs him to allow her and her mother to speak to Agamemnon, for Achilles will be too imperious :

Et mon père est jaloux de son autorité.

He agrees reluctantly and bids Clytemnestre be at ease, for he is determined to combat the gods to his last breath :

Votre fille vivra, je puis vous le prédire.  
Croyez du moins, croyez que tant que je respire,  
Les Dieux auront en vain ordonné son trépas.  
Cet oracle est plus sûr que celui de Calchas.

In Act IV the efforts made on Iphigénie's behalf increase the envy and alarm of Eriphile :

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N'as tu pas vu sa gloire, et le trouble d'Achille ?

Hé quoi ? ne vois-tu pas tout ce qu'on fait pour elle ?

On supprime des Dieux la sentence mortelle ;

Et quoique le bûcher soit déjà préparé,

Le nom de la victime est encore ignoré :

Tout le camp n'en sait rien. Doris, à ce silence,

Ne reconnois-tu pas un père qui balance ?

Iphigénie will be saved. The purpose of the oracle is to exalt her and make Ériphile more wretched. She thinks with wicked glee of spreading what she has learnt through the camp, turning Achille against Agamemnon and making the enemies of Troy fight among themselves. But her motive is more personal than patriotic ; as she finally admits, she acts " pour troubler un hymen odieux ".

Clytemnestre, like Achille, blames Iphigénie for understanding Agamemnon and forgiving him. When Agamemnon joins Clytemnestre he does not know that she has learnt his secret, and there is a tense exchange of questions until Iphigénie appears. Scene 4 of Act IV is the finest in the play. It is the family relationship that Racine has portrayed best in *Iphigénie*. The seasoned tie between husband and wife and child is a more profound, more real, thing in *Iphigénie* than the love between lovers which Racine has excellently portrayed elsewhere. It is not love that binds them but something deeper, a knowledge, that rankles in Clytemnestre, of the extent to which they are one another ; it is a solidarity that all her hatred cannot yet destroy. Racine does not long exploit Agamemnon's ignorance of the fact that his intention is known to Clytemnestre and Iphigénie. Clytemnestre greets her daughter ironically :

Venez, venez, ma fille, on n'attend plus que vous ;

Venez remercier un père qui vous aime,

Et qui veut à l'autel vous conduire lui-même.

Iphigénie advances, weeping, and Agamemnon cries out that he

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has been betrayed. Iphigénie reassures him, showing her ability to silence her emotions before she reveals them gently, and then asks pardon for having done so :

Mon père,  
Cessez de vous troubler, vous n'êtes point trahi.  
Quand vous commanderez, vous serez obéi.  
Ma vie est votre bien. Vous voulez le reprendre :  
Vos ordres sans détour pouvoient se faire entendre.  
D'un œil aussi content, d'un cœur aussi soumis  
Que j'acceptois l'époux que vous m'aviez promis,  
Je saurai, s'il le faut, victime obéissante,  
Tendre au fer de Calchas une tête innocente,  
Et respectant le coup par vous-même ordonné,  
Vous rendre tout le sang que vous m'avez donné.  
Si pourtant ce respect, si cette obéissance  
Paroît digne à vos yeux d'une autre récompense,  
Si d'une mère en pleurs vous plaignez les ennuis,  
J'ose vous dire ici qu'en l'état où je suis  
Peut-être assez d'honneurs environnoient ma vie  
Pour ne pas souhaiter qu'elle me fût ravie,  
Ni qu'en me l'arrachant un sévère destin  
Si près de ma naissance en eût marqué la fin.

She appeals on behalf of her mother and her lover, but if necessary she will acquiesce. Iphigénie will die regretting what life has promised her, but feeling Agamemnon worthy of the sacrifice. Agamemnon is moved, but not to the point of complete sincerity. Yet he is not deliberately dishonest ; it is the extent to which he shares Iphigénie's view of him that arouses Clytemnestre's resentment. Agamemnon hides from himself. He evades responsibility for having lured Iphigénie into danger and cites his endeavour to save her as a proof of the strength of his affection :

Je vous sacrifiois mon rang, ma sûreté.

His love is strong enough to prevent him from sacrificing her without vacillation. He protests now that the decision is out of his hands and requires her life. Yet he discovers afterwards

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that another attempt to save her is possible. He appeals to the pride she has inherited from him :

Ma fille, il faut céder. Votre heure est arrivée.  
Songez bien dans quel rang vous êtes élevée.  
Je vous donne un conseil qu'à peine je reçois.  
Du coup qui vous attend vous mourrez moins que moi.  
Montrez, en expirant, de qui vous êtes née :  
Faites rougir ces dieux qui vous ont condamnée.  
Allez ; et que les Grecs, qui vont vous immoler,  
Reconnoissent mon sang en le voyant couler.

His calm acceptance of the sacrifice as a due infuriates Clytemnestre. Her speech is the finest in the play. There is not an aspect of the situation he has presented which she fails to reveal as the perverse creation of his mind, and the only thing that is real while she speaks is her indignation. He spoke of his proud race and Clytemnestre shows how she observes that blood in him :

Vous ne démentez point une race funeste.  
Oui, vous êtes le sang d'Atrée et de Thyeste.  
Bourreau de votre fille, il ne vous reste enfin  
Que d'en faire à sa mère un horrible festin.

What is monstrous in her husband's family condemns her daughter and nothing else. Agamemnon has made no serious attempt to protect her :

Quel champ couvert de morts me condamne au silence ?

She beats down every obstacle with methodical rage until Iphigénie stands senselessly condemned. She questions the clarity of the oracle, the justice of the demand. With a fine impartiality she belabours her own family as unsparingly as she had Agamemnon's :

Si du crime d'Hélène on punit sa famille,  
Faites chercher à Sparte Hermione sa fille :  
Laissez à Ménélas racheter d'un tel prix  
Sa coupable moitié, dont il est trop épris.

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Mais vous, quelles fureurs vous rendent sa victime ?  
Pourquoi vous imposer la peine de son crime ?  
Pourquoi moi-même enfin me déchirant le flanc,  
Payer sa folle amour du plus pur de mon sang ?  
Que dis-je ? Cet objet de tant de jalousie,  
Cette Hélène, qui trouble et l'Europe et l'Asie,  
Vous semble-t-elle un prix digne de vous exploits ?  
Combien nos fronts pour elle ont-ils rougi de fois !

Iphigénie alone is her family, not Helen, not Agamemnon.  
Helen is unworthy of the sacrifice and Agamemnon is not  
making it for her but for himself :

Cette soif de régner, que rien ne peut éteindre,  
L'orgueil de voir vingt rois vous servir et vous craindre,  
Tous les droits de l'empire en vos mains confiés,  
Cruel, c'est à ces dieux que vous sacrifiez ;  
Et loin de repousser le coup qu'on vous prépare,  
Vous voulez vous en faire un mérite barbare.  
Trop jaloux d'un pouvoir qu'on peut vous envier,  
De votre propre sang vous courez le payez,  
Et voulez par ce prix épouvanter l'audace  
De quiconque vous peut disputer votre place.  
Est-ce donc être père ? Ah ! toute ma raison  
Cède à la cruauté de cette trahison.

Against the ambition she makes seem so petty and so personal  
she sets the hideous cost at which it must be satisfied. There is  
no right greater than Clytemnestre's to avoid the anguish she  
describes :

Un prêtre, environné d'une foule cruelle,  
Portera sur ma fille une main criminelle,  
Déchirera son sein et d'un œil curieux  
Dans son cœur palpitant consultera les Dieux !  
Et moi, qui l'amenai triomphante, adorée,  
Je m'en retournerai seule et désespérée !  
Je verrai les chemins encor tout parfumés  
Des fleurs dont sous ses pas on les avoit semés !  
Non, je ne l'aurai point amenée au supplice,  
Ou vous ferez aux Grecs un double sacrifice.

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Ni crainte ni respect ne m'en peut détacher.  
De mes bras tout sanglants il faudra l'arracher.  
Aussi barbare époux qu'impitoyable père,  
Venez, si vous l'osez, la ravir à sa mère.  
Et vous, rentrez, ma fille, et du moins à mes lois  
Obéissez encor pour la dernière fois.

Agamemnon is moved, but is interrupted by Achilles before he has progressed beyond self-pity.

Achilles questions Agamemnon with some attempt at courtesy but is rebuffed for his pains, and replies with increasing wrath, but still reasonably, ending :

Je ne connois Priam, Hélène, ni Paris ;  
Je voulois votre fille, et ne pars qu'à ce prix.

Offended, Agamemnon dismisses him, but Achilles will not relinquish his claim to Iphigénie and repeats his intention of defending her. Agamemnon is capable, though not for long, of allowing Achilles's defiance to be the decisive factor in Iphigénie's fate, lest his pity be mistaken for fear. But the thought of his daughter's submissiveness disarms him. He will spare her, but she shall not marry Achilles. Agamemnon gives the gods a chance to repent. If they want Iphigénie they must ask again. He does not say, with Clytemnestre and Achilles, that he will never consent, but

Que peuvent devant vous tous les foibles humains ?

At the end of Act IV Agamemnon sends Clytemnestre and Iphigénie secretly from the camp, but his decision has only a limited control over the outcome :

Tout dépend du secret et de la diligence.  
Ulysse ni Calchas n'ont point encor parlé ;  
Gardez que ce départ ne leur soit révélé.

In the meantime he will deceive Calchas and play for time, so that the alarm is not given until they have gone. But Ériphile, in the last scene of the act, believing that Iphigénie's reprieve

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is the work of Achille, sets out to warn Calchas, pronouncing her own doom as she does so : " Il faut ou la perdre ou périr ". Iphigénie's fate still seems to hang in the balance.

In Act V there is continual excitement. The flight of Clytemnestre and Iphigénie has been forcibly prevented by the camp. Iphigénie cannot endure the thought of the indignities to which the queen is exposed and is unwilling to continue the attempt to escape. Besides, she confides, she does not wish to live on Agamemnon's terms. She has learnt that she must renounce Achille, and, in the deadly peril that surrounds her, demurs at this severity :

Aegine, il me défend de lui parler jamais.

On the arrival of Achille, who confidently offers her protection, her tears fall and she does not answer him. He then speaks his most characteristic line, practical but arrogant and hurtful even when he is in love and would be kind :

Hâtons-nous : votre père a déjà vu vos larmes.

When she persists in her refusal he impatiently reminds her :

Que le bonheur d'Achille est fondé sur vos jours ?

Iphigénie, who a moment ago had spoken almost plaintively of Agamemnon's command concerning Achille, now looks forward heroically to her death. She endeavours to forget her individual loss in pride of race, and succeeds in finding a personal compensation there :

Partez : à vos honneurs j'apporte trop d'obstacles.  
Vous-même dégagez la foi de vos oracles ;  
Signalez ce héros à la Grèce promis ;  
Tournez votre douleur contre ses ennemis.  
Déjà Priam pâlit ; déjà Troie en alarmes  
Redoute mon bûcher, et frémit de vos larmes.  
Allez ; et dans ses murs vides de citoyens,  
Faites pleurer ma mort aux veuves des Troyens.  
Je meurs dans cet espoir, satisfaite et tranquille.  
Si je n'ai pas vécu la compagne d'Achille,



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J'espère que du moins un heureux avenir  
A vos faits immortels joindra mon souvenir ;  
Et qu'un jour mon trépas, source de votre gloire,  
Ouvrira le récit d'une si belle histoire.  
Adieu, Prince ; vivez, digne race des Dieux.

But Achilles, keen in argument even with his arm raised to strike, distinguishes between her father's interests and his own and begs her to accompany him. His firmness is no greater than Iphigénie's. Both are expressed with great simplicity. Iphigénie says, to restrain the forceful Achilles :

Quoi ? Seigneur, vous iriez jusques à la contrainte ?

Ma gloire vous seroit moins chère que ma vie ?

Achilles, only now seriously doubting his ability to save her, breaks into a fine fury :

Vous allez à l'autel, et moi j'y cours, Madame.  
Si de sang et de morts le ciel est affamé,  
Jamais de plus de sang ses autels n'ont fumé.  
A mon aveugle amour tout sera légitime.  
Le prêtre deviendra la première victime ;  
Le bûcher, par mes mains détruit et renversé,  
Dans le sang des bourreaux nagera dispersé ;  
Et si dans les horreurs de ce désordre extrême  
Votre père frappé tombe et périt lui-même,  
Alors, de vos respects voyant les tristes fruits,  
Reconnoissez les coups que vous aurez conduits.

Next Clytemnestre appears, proclaiming :

Oui, je la défendrai contre toute l'armée.

But newly recovered from a swoon she pits all her ferocious protectiveness against the situation described :

C'est d'un zèle fatal tout le camp aveuglé.  
Plus de pitié. Calchas seul règne, seul commande :  
La piété sévère exige son offrande.  
Le Roi de son pouvoir se voit déposséder. . . .

She will not accept what she foresees. The simplest words are

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used to express Clytemnestre's terrible negation of an intolerable future. What Clytemnestre wants to say cannot be said more clearly than it is after she has given up the attempt to say it, in a possessive exclamation :

Mon corps sera plutôt séparé de mon âme,  
Que je souffre jamais. . . . Ah ! ma fille.

And soon after he has given the impression of unutterable anguish in Clytemnestre Racine contrives to have her say, one primitive strangely consecutive cry after another scaling the heights of her endurance, until indeed her soul seems to leave her body in the words, all that was suggested by her turning to her child and saying only : " ma fille ". The sweet and gallant plea of Iphigénie does not reach her. Iphigénie is not as painfully involved in life as Clytemnestre. Between Iphigénie and events there is a set of principles. The most terrible things cannot happen to her. But between Clytemnestre and life there is a direct contact and Clytemnestre cannot bear the cruelty and finality of what occurs. Whether what is done be right or inevitable does not concern her, and will not offer consolation. That it is done is what she cannot bear. The Racinian character does not feel a terror of soul to see the harsh face of life but sometimes a great anger, a swelling energy to defy it. The fortunate turn of events by which Iphigénie is spared will not make Clytemnestre forget the extent to which Agamemnon could separate his interests from hers, and what might have happened. Aspects of the story which Racine does not treat in *Iphigénie* are called to mind when Iphigénie pleads with Clytemnestre :

Surtout, si vous m'aimez, par cet amour de mère,  
Ne reprochez jamais mon trépas à mon père,

and when she tries to console her :

De l'amour qui vous joint vous avez d'autres nœuds ;  
Vos yeux me verront dans Oreste mon frère.  
Puisse-t-il être, hélas ! moins funeste à sa mère !

The Atridae will not fail to destroy themselves.

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Iphigénie sets out alone on her way to the altar and Clytemnestre tries to follow her and is prevented by the soldiers. Forced to wait and do nothing, she cries :

Mourrai-je tant de fois, sans sortir de la vie ?

She is told that it is Ériphile who has betrayed them and her wrath breaks like a storm, opening with almost full volume, and ranging through the spaces of the world, until her mind returns to the place where Iphigénie is dying and she throws out her last threat with appalling force. Her concluding line clangs like metal struck. Clytemnestre feels the powers of the world within her call :

O monstre, que Mégère en ses flancs a porté !  
Monstre, que dans nos bras les enfers ont jeté !  
Quoi ? tu ne mourras point ? Quoi ? pour punir son crime . . .  
Mais où va ma douleur chercher une victime ?  
Quoi ? pour noyer les Grecs et leurs mille vaisseaux,  
Mer, tu n'ouvriras pas des abîmes nouveaux ?  
Quoi ? lorsque les chassant du port qui les recèle,  
L'Aulide aura vomé leur flotte criminelle,  
Les vents, les mêmes vents, si longtemps accusés,  
Ne te couvriront pas de ses vaisseaux brisés ?  
Et toi, soleil, et toi, qui dans cette contrée  
Reconnois l'héritier et le vrai fils d'Atrée,  
Toi, qui n'osas du père éclairer le festin,  
Recule, ils t'ont appris ce funeste chemin.  
Mais, cependant, ô ciel ! ô mère infortunée !  
De festons odieux ma fille couronnée  
Tend la gorge aux couteaux par son père apprêtés.  
Calchas va dans son sang. . . Barbares, arrêtez.  
C'est le pur sang du Dieu qui lance le tonnerre. . .  
J'entends gronder la foudre, et sens trembler la terre.  
Un Dieu vengeur, un Dieu fait retentir ces coups.

Arcas appears and describes the exploits of Achilles who has fought his way to the altar and set a guard about Iphigénie, while Agamemnon, unaltered to the end, stands hiding his face.

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Achille has sent Arcas to bring Clytemnestre to her daughter ; she need have no fear in following Arcas. Clytemnestre replies : " *Moi, craindre ? . . . J'irai partout.*" She catches sight of Ulysse and calls out that it is too late, Iphigénie is dead. It is not until the last scene of the play that anxiety is allayed. Clytemnestre has difficulty in believing that Ulysse is the bearer of good news. He reassures her briefly and without delay before he explains at length how she was saved. He tells how Achille stood :

votre fille alarmée  
Voyoit pour elle Achille, et contre elle l'armée ;  
Mais quoique seul pour elle, Achille furieux  
Épouvantoit l'armée, et partageoit les Dieux.

Then Calchas, with all the signs of inspiration upon him, advanced and delivered an explanation of the oracle. It is another relation of Helen, another Iphigénie, whom the gods demand, the daughter of Helen and Theseus of whom Clytemnestre spoke to Agamemnon in Act IV. The child grew up ignorant of her name and parentage. She is known as Ériphile. Calchas advances upon her, with the approval of the army. She was standing by the altar, impatient perhaps at the delay. She must have seen the proof of devotion Achille had given in his defence of Iphigénie. Before Calchas can reach her she takes a knife from the altar and kills herself. Her last words are proud :

Le sang de ces héros dont tu me fais descendre  
Sans tes profanes mains saura bien se répandre.

As her blood flows the elements are appeased :

Les Dieux font sur l'autel entendre le tonnerre ;  
Lès vents agitent l'air d'heureux frémissements,  
Et la mer leur répond par ses mugissements ;  
La rive au loin gémit, blanchissante d'écume ;  
La flamme du bûcher d'elle-même s'allume ;  
Le ciel brille d'éclairs, s'entr'ouvre, et parmi nous  
Jette une sainte horreur qui nous rassure tous.

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Le soldat étonné dit que dans une nue  
Jusque sur le bûcher Diane est descendue,  
Et croit que s'élevant au travers de ses feux,  
Elle portoit au ciel notre encens et nos vœux.

The gods are more real, however, when Clytemnestre speaks of them.

Iphigénie weeps at the fate of Ériphile but everyone else rejoices. Clytemnestre offers thanks to heaven and to Achille but does not mention Agamemnon. Ériphile has been allowed to deserve her death and appears to have lived only in order to do so. It is her miserable life that seems unjust. Iphigénie would have been unjustly sacrificed, but with Ériphile the injustice preceded her birth. She is one of the disinherited, in character as well as in other things, like Oreste. There is nothing for her but envy and a moment's pride. The other characters are content to be spared and do not converse with fate further than they must. Racine investigates it further in his last plays.

It is the vivid characterization and wonderful verse which make *Iphigénie* a fine play in spite of faults in its structure.

## Phèdre

1677

IN *Phèdre* Racine has taken great care, as he points out himself, to "conserver la vraisemblance de l'histoire, sans rien perdre des ornements de la fable, qui fournit extrêmement à la poésie". Phaedra belongs to an old Greek myth. She is the daughter of Minos, one of the judges of the shades in Hades, and of Pasiphaë, who loved the Cretan bull. Pasiphaë is the daughter of Helios, the sun. The daughters of Minos and Pasiphaë are Ariadne and Phaedra. To avenge a wrong done to his son, Minos compels the Athenians to send to Crete every ninth year seven youths and seven maidens to be devoured by the Minotaur, a monstrous bull-headed creature, kept in a labyrinth constructed by Daedalus. Theseus, whose wife Phaedra becomes, slays the Minotaur, Phaedra's half-brother, with the help of Ariadne, the incident to which *Phèdre* will refer in the play. Theseus is the son of Aegeus, King of Athens, who is the adopted son of Pandion. The nephews of Aegeus are the Pallantidae, the sons of Pallas, who was in the direct line of descent of the Athenian royal family. On the death of Aegeus they hoped to recover the throne and conspired against Theseus, who put them to death. Aricia appears in Racine's play as the sister of the Pallantidae. She is thus a descendant of Rhea, the Earth. The actors in this play are the children of the sun and the earth, the divinities of the ancient world, on which all are dependent still, for light and heat and food and burial.

Hippolytus is the son of Theseus and of Antiope, the Amazon. In the old legend Phædra is in love with him but he spurns her. She then goes to Theseus and accuses Hippolytus of her own crime. Theseus calls down the wrath of the gods on his son and Hippolytus is killed by a sea monster. Phædra commits suicide. In the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, Hippolytus is the hero, and in Seneca's play Phædra is so debased and willingly subject to her passion that she ceases to interest. The French plays on the subject before Racine, with the exception of Garnier's in spite of all its faults, are important mainly because they may have influenced Racine. He has adopted and omitted always with the same end in view. He makes everything centre in Phèdre. She becomes one of the most compelling characters in tragedy. The goddesses that stand on either side of the stage in Euripides' play, contend in the soul of the Phèdre of Racine to possess her. Phèdre steps renewed from the shadow of Phædra, created so long ago. The elemental powers of the world were gods. They swayed men. Magnifying themselves beyond royalty to divinity, men pulled their gods down to earth and found in them much of their own nature. The great world stands about Phèdre as the outline of her own mind. Nothing exists except to mark it out. She sees her love in one shape and her shame in another. Her kingdom is a bribe for Hippolyte. The details of the poetic background are a living setting for her movements. They themselves move; they are potential actors in the tragedy. There is no dead weight in this legend for Racine. What Phèdre's mind casts up in pain from its unknown edge of being to its reason, takes the form of a familiar thing, such as it had long known of and named like others, Venus or Minos, Love or Death the judge; starting like a solitary brand-new thing in the soul, and, when recognized, becoming part of those old destinies that seemed in their arbitrary strength to be embodied in the forms of gods.

Théramène, with his attitude of complicity, knowing and

## PHÈDRE

worldly, drawing his charge into a confession of love and asking yet again :

La charmante Aricie a-t-elle su vous plaire ?

and providing the superb oration that replaces the corpse at the end of the play, is responsible for a great deal of the fault-finding *Phèdre* has aroused. He is the voice from outside the cursed circle that binds the others, even *Oenone*, to *Phèdre* in a love as fatal as *Phèdre's* for *Hippolyte*. He is immoral, loquacious perhaps, but, like chorus or messenger, he is the voice of the crowd. They create their own realities ; he sees what is there for everyone to see. To him love is sweet and usual, but it humiliates *Hippolyte* to share the common lot. *Hippolyte* is complacent ; he is often called a prig, but still he is the shining youth, the crystalline object of *Phèdre's* desire. He loves his own magnificent endowment, courage, strength, idealism, as much as he loves *Aricie*, but he has these qualities, no less than the legendary *Hippolytus*. *Théramène* accepts the faults of *Thésée* with his virtues and mentions them as easily. That is *Theseus*, King of Athens, with great faults and great virtues, a lawful man overcoming brigands and monsters, as *Hippolyte* repeats :

Procruste, Cercyon, et Scirron, et Sinnis,  
Et les os dispersés du géant d'Épidaure,  
Et la Crète fumant du sang du Minotaure.

and a brigand in his own way :

Hélène à ses parents dans Sparte dérobée ;  
Salamine témoin des pleurs de Pénibée ;

Ariane aux rochers contant ses injustices,  
Phèdre enlevée enfin sous de meilleurs auspices ;

*Hippolyte* would choose among his father's deeds and make himself a model hero. He is *Antiope's* son. It is shame to love at all, but to love *Aricie* is treachery. *Théramène* is a foil to the scrupulous *Hippolyte*. He opposes arguments to sentiments.



He has been reproached for mentioning Antiope among Thésée's loves, and Hippolyte congratulated for leaving her out of a list that he could have refrained from compiling. But he named her as the source of his own chastity, not deliberately omitting her, but naturally if illogically holding his mother an exception. Théràmène's argument, although unhappily expressed, offers him a new point of view. Antiope was not only chaste but she loved; there is not necessarily a contradiction. Théràmène chooses whom Hippolyte most respects not to discredit her but to vindicate lovers. His speech is positively coy and he distresses Hippolyte. He paints him heavy-eyed with love. Hippolyte recoils :

Théràmène, je pars, et vais chercher mon père.

In itself, the reply has a humorous effect. But after the whole insinuating speech which precedes it, it is a relief, naïve but touchingly resolute.

Hippolyte had named Phèdre by her redoutable origin

La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaé,

and Théràmène mentioned her former harshness towards Hippolyte and the mysterious illness from which she is now suffering. But she was considered less as a person than as a factor in Hippolyte's problem. Uneasy because of the prolonged absence of his father and disturbed by his love for Aricie, and using his anxiety to hide his love, Hippolyte is about to take leave of Phèdre and depart in search of Thésée. But now comes Oenone, full of love and anxiety for the dying queen :

Elle meurt dans mes bras d'un mal qu'elle me cache.

She holds her in her arms. She had brought her into the world. Alone in the play she suffers with the queen. She sins for her and is cast off, and dies with Phèdre's curse upon her.

Phèdre, having almost driven her life from her body but not her love, cannot rest within and comes richly attired to the sun-

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light. She is intolerably weary. The light smites her eyes, her hair is a weight upon her brow, she cannot stand.

Je ne me soutiens plus : ma force m'abandonne.  
Mes yeux sont éblouis du jour que je revoi,  
Et mes genoux tremblants se dérobent sous moi.  
Hélas !

The wonderful lines are a gradual unlooping of her strength, a nerveless outgoing of breath to a last sigh. She sits, her weakness an irritation that spurs her to complaint : ✓

✓ Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent !  
Quelle importune main, en formant tous ces nœuds,  
A pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux ?  
Tout m'afflige et me nuit, et conspire à me nuire.

The verb repeated at the end of the line, throwing back attention to the centre, gives an effect of involution that mirrors her state of mind. The last line with its wailing vowels orchestrates Phèdre's tortuous seeking in vain for a way out, beating from thought to thought, until the barrier between thought and speech wears thin and she wonders at herself. Oenone's reply, matter of fact, without music, states what Phèdre's words had suggested :

, Comme on voit tous ses vœux l'un l'autre se détruire ! "

Phèdre calls upon the sun in farewell, in the eyes of Oenone renouncing life, in her own eyes abashed as unworthy of the life received from that great source. Her thoughts turn from the sun and she thinks, not of the falling-off from her origin but of the reason for it, of Hippolyte in the cool forest :

✓ Dieux ! que ne suis-je assise à l'ombre des forêts ! ✓

Then shame runs over her and her eyes fill, that thus this thought has crept upon her at the moment when she had retreated from it to the point of death, and had said :

Soleil, je te viens voir pour la dernière fois.

Her darker instincts betray her as she looks upon the sun. The

## A NEW VIEW OF THE PLAYS OF RACINE

gods attack unfairly. She is willing to pay the price of performing an act of will, she will sacrifice all that stands in the way, make it a lesser desire although it be very great. Against her will the thought comes again. What can she do that she has left undone? She had sent Hippolyte from her, had won his dislike as a jealous stepmother. She has said no word of her love, to think of it is shameful to her and she does so only involuntarily and hates herself for it. This is the tragedy of Phèdre, the inability of her will to accept her passion or destroy it. She has paid the price of pain and loss for something that the gods, that forces in her own nature, deny her. It is Minos judging Pasi-phæë, saying what this thing is and that it is hateful but unable to alter it. Phèdre is the victim of her heredity; daughter, it is often said, of light and darkness; her love is carnal, as destructive as a sickness, it is unlawful and eerily strong, as if, indeed, unearthly powers possessed her. But it is not in itself a base thing. It is a sickness in the flesh but a sickness that only human flesh allows. Love in Racine is carnal but it is essentially human. Seneca in his *Phædra* overlooks the distinction. The body of the French Phèdre never ceases to be the home of a human, most magnanimous spirit, whose pain is the measure of her purity. She renounces happiness, but no peace comes. She renounces life and her thought of death is coloured with desire for Hippolyte.

What Phèdre says streams from her, unchecked and regretted later, the outcome of her exhaustion. Oenone argues wordily, making the most inappropriate pleas: that Phèdre by her death sins against the gods — her treacherous enemies — that she wrongs her husband — the faithless Thésée — that her stepson will benefit to the detriment of her own children. Now Phèdre cries out at his name and Oenone, warming to her purpose, rhetorically bids her not allow that

le fils d'une Scythe,  
Accablant vos enfants d'un empire odieux,  
Commande au plus beau sang de la Grèce et des Dieux.

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Phèdre herself is never rhetorical. It is a simple moving line of Oenone's that wins response from her :

*Mon pays, mes enfants, pour vous j'ai tout quitté.*

She begs Oenone to desist. She feels that confession will increase her guilt, add reality to the crime that she has not committed, the commission of which means her happiness. She feels guilty in intention but she has done nothing wrong :—

*Grâces au ciel, mes mains ne sont point criminelles.*

*Plût aux Dieux que mon cœur fût innocent comme elles !*

Phèdre feels the defilement of a state of being, deeper, less rational and more overpowering than the guilt incurred by an actual deed. She rings it round with reticence, shuns Hippolyte's name, flies from the thought in her own mind. At last, tense and short, she gives way :

*Tu le veux. Lève-toi.*

But still she cannot bluntly say it and be done. She thinks of those older miseries, her mother's and her sister's, and now their fate is hers, and she pities them :

*O haine de Vénus ! O fatale colère !*

*Dans quels égarements l'amour jeta ma mère !*

*Ariane, ma sœur, de quel amour blessée,*

*Vous mourûtes aux bords où vous fûtes laissée !*

In those lines grief mourns and deepens like a familiar melody growing audible as the distance lessens, and when Phèdre turns to her own love it is near, insistent, claiming kinship not with her own family alone but with all that is human.

*Quand ma bouche imploroit le nom de la Déesse,*

*J'adorais Hippolyte ; et le voyant sans cesse,*

*Même au pied des autels que je faisais fumer,*

*J'offrois tout à ce Dieu que je n'osois nommer.*

*Je l'évitois partout. O comble de misère !*

*Mes yeux le retrouvoient dans les traits de son père.*

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Bare statement, with that singing undercurrent that renews what gave it rise. Phèdre, assailed by love when she sees Hippolyte, so that

Mes yeux ne voyoient plus, je ne pouvois parler ;  
✓ Je sentis tout mon corps et transir et brûler ;

prays and tries to appease that great power, Vénus, that burns in the blood of Phèdre's family ; but when she worships Vénus it is the form of Hippolyte that rises before her, and she finds him even in the face of his father, her husband. Her love is like a beast prowling in her mind, terrible but dear, like the one her mother loved. When they meet again, ironically, at Thésée's wish, it has tracked her down :

C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée  
and she seeks refuge in death.

At this moment Panope enters with news of Thésée's death. No one mourns him. How should Phèdre be more than shocked at this death, suddenly announced when she is facing death herself. It is for her the moment of suspension that follows on violent change from one state to another. She was about to die, but it is Thésée who is dead. New facts are presented to her, she listens dazed. It is Oenone who discovers that Phèdre's love is no longer adulterous, and who insists that it is not incestuous. She appeals to Phèdre to live for her son and Phèdre agrees. But she had ignored this plea when made before. It is true that her son needs her protection more than ever now, but Phèdre accepts life again, not for her son, but for herself. She finds it tolerable, suddenly, yet what has changed ? Thésée is dead, but Phèdre does not consider her love permissible on that account. ✓ Oenone has suggested that Phèdre should unite with Hippolyte against the supporters of Aricie, and Phèdre is going to see Hippolyte for that purpose ; she is going to see him, and she wishes to live. If it is not hope of happiness, still it is hope.

At the end of Act I Phèdre's fate is grim and unscrupulous at her heels. She hopes and does not know it, and her hope only

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makes her unprepared for pain. She cannot unite with Hippolyte against Aricie whom Hippolyte loves. She cannot withstand the presence of Hippolyte ; at each meeting her desire grew in strength. Yet another meeting lies before her, and it is to occur at a most unfavourable time.

Before Phèdre sees Hippolyte, he goes to Aricie. The first scene of Act II is given over to further exposition. Aricie is Phèdre's rival and that is the most important thing about her. She is not to be compared with Junie or Monime. She is slight but she is given individuality :

Mais de faire fléchir un courage inflexible,  
De porter la douleur dans une âme insensible. . . .

Pain and love are inseparable, even for the minor characters in Racine. Aricie is *précieuse* to no good purpose. The preciousness of Antigone in *La Thébaine* was the outcome of a subtle mood that demanded delicate expression. The preciousness of Aricie and Hippolyte is for the most part an exercise in ingenious implication, a sort of fencing-match of compliments, yet occasionally Hippolyte's simplicity finds direct and moving expression, especially towards the end of the scene.

The most important point about the love-scene between Hippolyte and Aricie is that it is interrupted by Phèdre's message. The thought of this meeting recalled her from death. To Hippolyte it is a "fâcheux entretien" from which he bids Thérémène speedily deliver him. The self-possession of Aricie, just witnessed, throws the scene with Phèdre into startling relief. Phèdre on seeing Hippolyte can think of nothing else. She forgets for a moment that she had come to speak for her son. Reminded by Oenone, she begins, courageously conventional :

On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous,  
Seigneur,

and succeeds in making her appeal for support. But at his brief rather self-righteous reply, she leaves the topic of herself as a

mother and wants only to communicate something of what she had meant to hide :

Dans le fond de mon cœur vous ne pouviez pas lire.

She cannot resist increasingly clear reference to her love and Hippolyte thinks that she is speaking of Thésée. Now Phèdre cannot bear any longer that she should be so separated from Hippolyte that, standing before him, he should yet not see her as she is to herself, but distantly address her as a stepmother. All the loneliness and pain of the separate soul, unable to tell its unique adventure and dangerously communicating its purpose without the burning need that makes it comprehensible, are in her words. She draws Hippolyte to her in the closest relationship. He is to her the perfect lover whom she had not found in Thésée ; it is he who is most truly her husband. She associates him with her past, with her dreams, remakes her life with Hippolyte in the place of Thésée and herself replacing Ariane. A glimpse of the ideal Thésée come to birth in Hippolyte, his son, had haunted her in her husband's face, and now she sees in Hippolyte Thésée whom she married, as he might have been, and as he might have come to her. It is a confusion of relationships that, although so natural to the speaker, is the very dramatization of incest. Racine's predecessors in France had handled the theme fearfully. He minutely imagines the hideous circumstance and sees through Phèdre's eyes how everything of Thésée can become Hippolyte's, and the facing of the mythological monster in Daedalus's labyrinth have a new implication, the unnatural peril shared and maybe circumvented :

Oui, Prince, je languis, je brûle pour Thésée.  
Je l'aime, non point tel que l'ont vu les enfers,  
Volage adorateur de mille objets divers,  
Qui va du dieu des morts déshonorer la couche ;  
Mais fidèle, mais fier, et même un peu farouche,  
Charmant, jeune, traînant tous les cœurs après soi,  
Tel qu'on dépeint nos dieux, ou tel que je vous voi.

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Il avoit votre port, vos yeux, votre langage,  
Cette noble pudeur coloroit son visage  
Lorsque de notre Crète il traversa les flots,  
Digne sujet des vœux des filles de Minos.  
Que faisiez-vous alors ? Pourquoi, sans Hippolyte,  
Des héros de la Grèce assembla-t-il l'élite ?  
Pourquoi, trop jeune encor, ne pûtes-vous alors  
Entrer dans le vaisseau qui le mit sur nos bords ?  
Par vous auroit péri le monstre de la Crète,  
Malgré tous les détours de sa vaste retraite.  
Pour en développer l'embarras incertain,  
Ma sœur du fil fatal eût armé votre main.  
Mais non, dans ce dessein je l'aurois devancée :  
L'amour m'en eût d'abord inspiré la pensée.  
C'est moi, Prince, c'est moi dont l'utile secours  
Vous eût du Labyrinthe enseigné les détours.  
Que de soins m'eût coûtés cette tête charmante !  
Un fil n'eût point assez rassuré votre amante.  
Compagne du péril qu'il vous falloit chercher,  
Moi-même devant vous, j'aurois voulu marcher ;  
Et Phèdre, au Labyrinthe avec vous descendue  
Se seroit avec vous retrouvée, ou perdue.

The mature Phèdre is attracted by the blushing youth of Hippolyte, but she is as far from understanding it as he from understanding her when, upon his appalled outcry,

Madame, oubliez-vous  
Que Thésée est mon père, et qu'il est votre époux ?

she startlingly questions in turn :

Et sur quoi jugez-vous que j'en perds la mémoire,  
Prince ? Aurois-je perdu tout le soin de ma gloire ?

How can he fail to think that she has forgotten it, having said what she has said ? But Phèdre, who shortly before could not bring herself to speak of him to Oenone, is bitterly aware that this second confession is the outcome of sheer helplessness in the presence of Hippolyte, as the first one of physical exhaustion.



If she had spoken forgetful of her good name, she might yet remember it. She is alone in realizing how little it has availed her to remember it. She has experienced afresh the irresistibility of her passion, but she has shown it to him as nothing but criminal. He knows nothing of her agony of shame and she, out of that purity he cannot comprehend in her and which they have in common, asks quietly : " Et sur quoi jugez-vous. . . ." Hippolyte thinks that she wishes to retract and pretends to blame himself for having misunderstood her. But Phèdre, her love rejected, cannot endure that he should so little know her, and, isolated by all that pain he does not notice, tries to show him all her heart.

Hé bien ! connois donc Phèdre et toute sa fureur.  
J'aime. Ne pense pas qu'au moment que je t'aime,  
Innocente à mes yeux, je m'approuve moi-même ;  
Ni que du fol amour qui trouble ma raison  
Ma lâche complaisance ait nourri le poison.  
Objet infortuné des vengeances célestes,  
Je m'abhorre encor plus que tu ne me détestes.

And loathing herself as she speaks she feels again, even as she speaks, her great love for him, and his repulsion :

Si tes yeux un moment pouvoient me regarder.

Brutally, hurting herself because he despises her, she bids him

Délivre l'univers d'un monstre qui t'irrite.  
La veuve de Thésée ose aimer Hippolyte !

She sums up her crime as if she would, in spite of herself, lessen its enormity ; she is now the widow of Thésée. She bids him kill her, then takes the sword to spare him the indignity of taking such a life. Oenone intervenes and leads her within.

The last scene in Act II brings important developments in the situation. Thérémène remarks on Hippolyte's confusion but is too concerned with his own news to press for an explanation.

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Athens has declared for Phèdre and she is to rule in her son's name. Hippolyte, who feels

Je ne puis sans horreur me regarder moi-même.

ironically exclaims at the justice of the gods who thus reward the wicked, and determines to put Aricie in Phèdre's place. Thérémène has heard, too, rumours of Thésée's safe return. Phèdre's desperate, almost taunting statement of her position at its worst — "La veuve de Thésée ose aimer Hippolyte" — is no sooner made than it becomes an under-statement. From this fact result the circumstances that lead to Hippolyte's death.

By the end of Act I Phèdre, who had been willing to die to preserve her marital honour, believes herself a widow, and has agreed to encounter Hippolyte for her children's sake. At the end of Act II the meeting has occurred and, carried from her purpose, she has betrayed herself to Hippolyte, who recoils from her. Immediately after this comes a rumour of Thésée's survival. Phèdre's passion has overcome every barrier in her own mind. She is seen at the opening of Act III declining the regency. Weary, distraught, she thinks of what she has done and her horror is penetrated by the memory of Hippolyte's refusal.

J'ai dit ce que jamais on ne devoit entendre.

Ciel ! comme il m'écoutoit !

She feels again how his shame doubled her own. And her only thought is now, since passion has vanquished shame such as hers, that Hippolyte may be conquered too. Her greatest restraint was self-restraint. External opposition so far means little to her. She had turned back for love of purity, that proved ineffectual, she is not restrained by the hatred of Hippolyte. She cannot think it stronger than the first.

De l'austère pudeur les bornes sont passées.

Et l'espoir, malgré moi, s'est glissé dans mon cœur.

Tu m'as fait entrevoir que je pouvois l'aimer.

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She has for the first time seen her desire as possible. It is too late to relinquish it. Oenone, to whom the external obstacle is more real than the internal one had been, describes to her the scorn and disgust of Hippolyte. But Phèdre has begun to hope, and so

Enfin tous tes conseils ne sont plus de saison.  
Sers ma fureur, Oenone, et non point ma raison.

If he is indifferent to love, at least she will have no rival. And this proud woman, secure in her inherent nobility and rightness of being so that in the midst of her submission to Hippolyte's beauty she yet answered him soul to soul, as an equal, and accepted no contempt, and was not discountenanced, now tries to buy what she had been unable to win. She bids Oenone "fais briller la couronne à ses yeux". She freely gives Hippolyte the crown that she feels incapable of preserving for her son. Before, she wooed Hippolyte, laid claim to understanding, then to death. Now she is a suppliant. Again she wants to associate him with everything she has, place him in her past where Thésée stood, and see him as her child's father.

Presse, pleure, gémis ; plains-lui Phèdre mourante ;  
Ne rougis point de prendre une voix suppliante.

It was to avoid such a state as this that she had wished to die. This is not Phèdre with all her memories and obligations, knowing what is seemly even when she cannot choose it, but Phèdre obsessed. She is obsessed but not to such an extent that she ceases to know it. She knows what has happened to her but she cannot wish it otherwise. Much is written of her sense of sin. There is, at any rate, no doubt of her sense of humiliation. She feels punished already that she should be degraded to the point of acquiescence :

O toi, qui vois la honte où je suis descendue,  
Implacable Vénus, suis-je assez confondue ?  
Tu ne saurois plus loin pousser ta cruauté.

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But Phèdre is wrong. She has no sooner acknowledged and accepted her circumstances than they are altered. Oenone never carries her prayer to Hippolyte, for news of Thésée's return sends her flying back to Phèdre with counsel that falls gracelessly from her lips. "Rappelez votre vertu passée", she tells her. But Phèdre, chilled with horror, answers only :

Mon époux est vivant, Oenone, c'est assez.  
J'ai fait l'indigne aveu d'un amour qui l'outrage ;  
Il vit : je ne veux pas en savoir davantage.

There is nothing further to be said. But after the first numbing impact the irony of her position is not to be borne silently and drives her to reproach :

Je te l'ai prédit ; mais tu n'as pas voulu.  
Sur mes justes remords tes pleurs ont prévalu.  
Je mourois ce matin digne d'être pleurée ;  
J'ai suivi tes conseils, je meurs déshonorée.

Of all she says Oenone hears only that she intends to die. Then Phèdre looks into the future and looks away. How shall she go to meet her husband, Hippolyte by his side watching her ? And if he does not betray her, what hope has she of peace, knowing her guilt ? She prefers death.

Est-ce un malheur si grand que de cesser de vivre ?

Her only fear is that her children will be dishonoured by her crime. Oenone tells her that her fear is justified. Phèdre had wondered whether Hippolyte would betray her and Oenone describes him, her indignation riding the syllables :

Et conter votre honte à qui voudra l'ouïr.

But do you still love him ? she asks. And Phèdre replies :

Je le vois comme un monstre effroyable à mes yeux.

Then, says Oenone, pressing her advantage, accuse him before he has time to speak. Everything is against him. You will be

believed. But Oenone has never understood her mistress. Her "pourquoi donc" — since you do not love him, why not slander him — does not arouse pity or love for him in Phèdre, but something better :

Moi, que j'ose opprimer et noircir l'innocence ?

Oenone declares virtue less precious than the reputation of having it. Then the moment is upon them.

*Oenone* : On vient ; je vois Thésée.

*Phèdre* : Ah ! je vois Hippolyte ;

Dans ses yeux insolents je vois ma perte écrite.

Fais ce que tu voudras, je m'abandonne à toi.

Dans le trouble où je suis, je ne puis rien pour moi.

The breaking point in her resistance is reached for the third time. In the first act having determined not to do so, she confesses to Oenone, in the second act to Hippolyte. At the beginning of the third, she acquiesced in her passion :

Sers ma fureur, Oenone, et non point ma raison,

but at least the decision was hers. Here, soon after her spontaneous cry separating right from wrong, her strength deserts her and she abdicates her will to another. The coming and going of strength, her alternating ability and inability to will, is inexplicable, like thought, like faith, an unpredictable thing. It does not seem arbitrarily regulated by the author. It is affected by external events but not automatically and not according to a readily perceived pattern. Her temptation is systematically increased until it is greater than her power of resistance. The circumstances are manipulated with exquisite skill to that end, so that her soul may be revealed in every attitude of which it is capable, and know itself in these positions. Phèdre knows subjectively and objectively, she feels and judges. In her Racine studies the behaviour of a highly civilized being. He arranges circumstances so as to obtain the most effective display, but the behaviour itself seems to obey only its own

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laws, it seems completely free of artificial regulation. What regulates it is unknown even to itself and revealed only in action. Sometimes her will flags and sometimes it triumphs. But invariably, when she wills, acts with her full consent, she wills to do right. Thésée's return had been announced to her immediately after her only moment of acknowledged hope, when, at the end of Scene 2, the worst possibility seemed refusal : " On me déteste, on ne t'écoute pas ". Her sense of justice is not submerged in Scene 3 ; she knows right from wrong even though for the time Hippolyte himself becomes confused with her love for him and its results, so that she says : " Je le vois comme un monstre effroyable à mes yeux ". She is given no respite. The moment lowers before her and she cannot meet its need.

When Thésée approaches, Phèdre evades him with vague self-accusations. Her speech bears the interpretation Oenone puts upon it but it is not deliberately ambiguous. Phèdre says what comes to her mind and escapes. Hippolyte is no less overcome than Phèdre. His first words, like hers, may be construed as self-accusation and excuse. He feels guilty towards his father in his love for Aricie. He has been blamed for his readiness to give away his brother's throne, but he does not recognize this as disloyalty in himself. He had said to Aricie :

*Mais si pour concurrent je n'avois que mon frère,  
Madame, j'ai sur lui de véritables droits.*

After a moment Hippolyte recovers himself and explains this strange desire to depart on his father's arrival as flatteringly as he can. He would emulate Thésée's heroic deeds. Thésée, whose nature is instrumental in bringing about the terrible event that is impending, is struck by the dread that runs through his household at his approach. His long absence had given Hippolyte an excuse for deciding to set out in search of him and caused his taking leave of Aricie ; it had permitted not only Thérémène's unpleasant conjectures but a rumour of his death

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which made possible the meeting between Phèdre and Hippolyte. The rumour of Thésée's death is cited as an example of external causation in Racine. But external events make merely possible what their own natures render inevitable. Nothing irrevocable has happened yet, except in the minds of the characters. This is Racinian action, the spiritual change which brings about events. Occasionally the event is less striking, less impressive dramatically than what causes it, as at the end of *Britannicus* and *Bérénice*, and the mistake is made of thinking that Racine has ended his play in the wrong place or not chosen a tragic subject. It is Othello's tragedy to have murdered, not being a murderer, and he dies having committed the most grim murder possible for him. But Néron murders in the course of doing something else, most truly finding himself in the deed, and continues on his way unmoved, weakening only before his mother's wrath and at the loss of Junie. His fulfilment is destructive and self-destructive, and nothing is more tragic than the revelation at the end of Act V that this is irrevocably so. Agrippine's authority circumvented rather than defied; his self-restraint—never more than the result of fear—now gone, he is left at the mercy of himself, a very young man in a position of immense power. At the end of *Bérénice* lovers part, a common, not necessarily tragic, thing. No one dies, no one is a criminal. It depends only on Bérénice to see that it is not a tragedy. But in *Bérénice* Racine has portrayed a woman to whom this is in sober truth a tragedy. If she had been allowed to commit suicide like Phèdre, or had, unimaginably, become capable of murder like Roxane or Hermione, the conventional red ending would have cast a false light on the whole play, and this is one of the reasons why she is not allowed to do so. The subject of this play is not a love that leads to death but the parting of two lovers. The death of the heroine would usurp the place of the parting and be made to coincide with the catastrophe, instead of clearly following it, as in the case of Phèdre.

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Act III has been described as the least important in the play — it shows the confusion caused by the return of Thésée ; its purpose could be served by an account of a few lines. But Act III shows more than that. It shows how the characters pull their fates upon themselves. Phèdre has sinned in intention only but in her own eyes she is lost already. Whether she trusts Hippolyte or has him discredited, it cannot help her :

Il se tauroit en vain. Je sais mes perfidies,  
Oenone, et ne suis point de ces femmes hardies  
Qui goûtant dans le crime une tranquille paix. . . .

She says this before Oenone suggests the slander of Hippolyte and proves its truth by going immediately after the accusation to plead for him. She does not deliberately sacrifice Hippolyte for her own salvation. She feels beforehand that nothing can save her ; the sense of intolerable guilt precedes the slander, but she goes to Thésée not to be relieved of it, uncertain even as to whether she intends to confess : “ Peut-être à m'accuser j'aurois pu consentir ” ; with the thought of redress submerging everything else :

Je volois toute entière au secours de son fils.

Her guilt, although increased by Hippolyte's fate, is not in her own mind identified with it. Hippolyte feels polluted by Phèdre's love, guilty because of his own ; when Oenone slanders Hippolyte to Thésée, she describes Phèdre as seeking death in shame at having inspired such a passion. Nothing irrevocable has happened when Thésée returns. (They have only, like Bérénice, to realize it.) But to themselves they are fatally altered, and to them Thésée has come too late. And they cannot be pictured assuming their former attitudes towards Thésée, any more than Thésée — rash and over-confident in the favour of the gods — can be seen sifting evidence before he believes Phèdre innocent.

The accusation takes place off-stage between the third and



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fourth acts. Oenone is seen, having produced the incriminating sword, performing her part well but reluctantly :

Je vous ai dit, Seigneur, tout ce qui s'est passé.

Souffrez que je vous quitte. . . .

When Hippolyte comes Thésée is struck by his son's noble bearing, but he greets him with resounding abuse, culminating in

Reste impur des brigands dont j'ai purgé la terre.

The sight of his son, outwardly so far removed from what he has been called, enrages Thésée and he would have him gone.

Fuis, traître . . .

Fuis . . .

Fuis, dis-je . . .

And, beside himself, he curses his fair son, calling on Neptune to destroy him as that boon he had been promised and kept from asking in his greatest need until this hour. Hippolyte, stunned at first, can only repeat the accusation, but on Thésée's repeated abuse his innocence rises to magnificent expression. He is not bound in this play by a promise to the nurse but by his own reticence before his father.

Examinez ma vie, et songez qui je suis.

Quelques crimes toujours précèdent les grands crimes.

Quiconque a pu franchir les bornes légitimes

Peut violer enfin les droits les plus sacrés ;

Ainsi que la vertu, le crime a ses degrés ;

Et jamais on n'a vu la timide innocence

Passer subitement à l'extrême licence.

Un jour seul ne fait point d'un mortel vertueux

Un perfide assassin, un lâche incestueux.

He does not want to accuse her, he wants to be believed for the innate innocence shining in him. Again it seems a strange thing, as when Phèdre stood lonely before him, that such purity as this

## PHÈDRE

should not be immediately manifest by its presence but require words to proclaim it and then go unacknowledged. His innocence exhausts its argument and drops word by word like dew :

Le jour n'est pas plus pur que le fond de mon cœur.

But Thésée will not listen. It is Hippolyte's pride in not being as others that drove him to Phèdre :

Phèdre seule charmoit tes impudiques yeux.

Then Hippolyte tells of his love for Aricie and it seems to many critics that this lessens the nobility of his attitude towards his father. Perhaps it does, but it is most natural that to Hippolyte, newly in love and confessing it with difficulty, such a confession should be accepted as obviously true and proof positive of his indifference towards Phèdre. His essential candour would also urge him to confess as soon as possible the secret which weighs upon his mind. In any case, on this confession depends Phèdre's knowledge of his love for Aricie. Thésée treats his confession as a ruse and scoffs at it. Hippolyte can hardly bear his degradation in Thésée's eyes and is tempted to clear himself :

Vous me parlez toujours d'inceste et d'adultère ?  
Je me tais. Cependant Phèdre sort d'une mère,  
Phèdre est d'un sang, Seigneur, vous le savez trop bien,  
De toutes ces horreurs plus rempli que le mien.

He is not more explicit, and it is improbable that Thésée would now believe him if he were.

When the irritation of Hippolyte's presence is removed, Thésée's wrath begins to fall and leave him exposed to remorse, and he tries to enflame it again to silence his love for his son. The prayer to Neptune symbolizes an irrevocable act on Thésée's part. Nothing can avert Hippolyte's death, his "perte infail-  
lible".

Je t'aimois ; et je sens que malgré ton offense  
Mes entrailles pour toi se troublent par avance.

Jamais père en effet fut-il plus outragé ?

A NEW VIEW OF THE PLAYS OF RACINE

Thésée is usually blamed for his credulity, and he is credulous, but not improbably so. It is wrong to say that the sword is Oenone's only evidence. She cites Phèdre's earlier animosity against Hippolyte and Thésée puts his own interpretation upon Hippolyte's confusion. She comes, she says plausibly enough, to save her mistress distress. ✓ Phèdre herself comes to Thésée now and pleads for Hippolyte's life. Thésée tells her what Hippolyte has said, of his love for Aricie, and Phèdre forgets that Hippolyte is innocent, that he is in danger and that she had come to avert it. ✓ Thésée leaves her in order to pray for a speedy destruction of Hippolyte, but Phèdre thinks only :

Aricie a son cœur ! Aricie a sa foi !

She had thought herself without a rival. More, she had thought him incapable of love. Completely given over to a fresh view of what has happened, she forgets what is to come.

Hippolyte est sensible, et ne sent rien pour moi !

Peut-être a-t-il un cœur facile à s'attendrir.  
Je suis le seul objet qu'il ne sauroit souffrir ;  
Et je me chargerois du soin de le défendre ?

The last line, so supremely logical to her jealousy and pain, and in fact so unrelated to what has gone before, epitomizes her state of mind.

This is a torment transcending all the others. ✓ Jealousy descends on Phèdre like a mist through which Hippolyte and Aricie gleam intolerably, lighting up her pain, and all that earlier pain, through which one part of her nature met the other, changes its significance and is relived without self-knowledge to the more bitter accompaniment of their joy. Their happiness is something taken from her, she demands an account of it. It has been treacherously kept from her. She feels wronged and has only Oenone to blame. And then, unfailingly, her impartial mind shows her that she has distorted them, and, as unfailingly,

PHÈDRE

the clearer vision wounds her more deeply as she sees them pure :

Ils s'aiment ! Par quel charme ont-ils trompé mes yeux ?  
Comment se sont-ils vus ? Depuis quand ? Dans quels lieux ?  
Tu le savois. Pourquoi me laissois-tu séduire ?  
De leur furtive ardeur ne pouvois-tu m'instruire ?  
Les a-t-on vus souvent se parler, se chercher ?  
Dans le fond des forêts alloient-ils se cacher ?  
Hélas ! ils se voyoient avec pleine licence.  
Le ciel de leurs soupirs approuvoit l'innocence ;  
Ils suivoient sans remords leur penchant amoureux ;  
Tous les jours se levoient clairs et sereins pour eux.  
Et moi, triste rebut de la nature entière,  
Je me cachois au jour, je fuyois la lumière ;  
La mort est le seul dieu que j'osois implorer.  
J'attendois le moment où j'allois expirer ;  
*Me nourrissant de fiel, de larmes abreuvée,*  
Encor dans mon malheur de trop près observée. . . .

Nothing could be more expressive of envy and desire than the sweet dawns of Aricie described by Phèdre who fears to look upon the sun. At first she would lay hands on their happiness, examine it, and be minutely jealous. Then, above all, she would take it away. Oenone's attempt to console brings home to her the inalienable freedom of love that Pyrrhus cannot endure in Andromaque, Mithridate in Monime or Néron in Junie. Her rage rises heavily to a deed that suddenly appals her as she goes to do it, and on the threshold of action Phèdre halts and looks with shame and dread at what she has approached.

Ils s'aimeront toujours.  
Au moment que je parle, ah ! mortelle pensée !  
Ils bravent la fureur d'une amante insensée.  
Malgré ce même exil qui va les écarter,  
Ils font mille serments de ne se point quitter.  
Non, je ne puis souffrir un honneur qui m'outrage.  
Oenone, prends pitié de ma jalouse rage :  
Il faut perdre Aricie. Il faut de mon époux  
Contre un sang odieux réveiller le courroux.

## A NEW VIEW OF THE PLAYS OF RACINE

Qu'il ne se borne pas à des peines légères :  
Le crime de la sœur passe celui des frères.  
Dans mes jaloux transports je le veux implorer.  
Que fais-je ? Où ma raison se va-t-elle égarer ?  
Moi jalouse ! et Thésée est celui que j'implore !  
Mon époux est vivant, et moi je brûle encore !  
Pour qui ? Quel est le cœur où prétendent mes vœux ?  
Chaque mot sur mon front fait dresser mes cheveux.  
Mes crimes désormais ont comblé la mesure.  
Je respire à la fois l'inceste et l'imposture.

The lines weighted with the thought of her last and greatest crime crash into one long word of despair, then seem to rise as if she would fly and is arrested in mid-movement by forbidding eyes :

Mes homicides mains, promptes à me venger,  
Dans le sang innocent brûlent de se plonger.  
Misérable ! et je vis ? et je soutiens la vue  
De ce sacré soleil dont je suis descendue ?  
J'ai pour aïeul le père et le maître des Dieux ;  
Le ciel, tout l'univers est plein de mes aïeux.  
Où me cacher ? Fuyons dans la nuit infernale.  
Mais que dis-je ? mon père y tient l'urne fatale ;  
Le sort, dit-on, l'a mise en ses sévères mains :  
Minos juge aux enfers tous les pâles humains.  
Ah ! combien frémira son ombre épouvantée,  
Lorsqu'il verra sa fille à ses yeux présentée,  
Contrainte d'avouer tant de forfaits divers,  
Et des crimes peut-être inconnus aux enfers !  
Que diras-tu, mon père, à ce spectacle horrible ?  
Je crois voir de ta main tomber l'urne terrible ;  
Je crois te voir, cherchant un supplice nouveau,  
Toi-même de ton sang devenir le bourreau.  
Pardonne. Un Dieu cruel a perdu ta famille ;  
Reconnois sa vengeance aux fureurs de ta fille.  
Hélas ! du crime affreux dont la honte me suit  
Jamais mon triste cœur n'a recueilli le fruit.  
Jusqu'au dernier soupir de malheurs poursuivie,  
Je rends dans les tourments une pénible vie.

## PHÈDRE

It is not a lyric flight, as it is often taken to be. In her extremity Phèdre remembers her illustrious descent, and, marked out by it, stands pinioned between earth and sky. She would go from the world; it is her one desire. Nothing is more dramatic and more relevant to the present issue than her sudden perception that death is barred to her as a refuge, her feeling that she is hurrying from the light of day to a more relentless gaze, and turning from her guilt she is confronted by her guilt again and sees its judge. Then, essence of unfulfilled desire, close upon her plea comes the thought of what she has failed to do, though she feels she has incurred supreme guilt in the attempt. The third and fourth last lines of this speech should not be taken as an extension of her plea that she has been compelled by her hereditary fate. Vénus, she says, has betrayed her, but she goes on to speak of the shame of having been betrayed by Vénus; she accepts it as hers. She does not feel less guilty because of her failure, or offer it as an extenuating circumstance, for it was not due to merit in her; she had done her utmost to succeed. Phèdre always judges the intention as if it were the act. It is not an excuse; it is Hippolyte accompanying her to the grave, that those lines contain; Hippolyte never hers. At the end of her confession to Oenone in the first act she had thought of her lost purity and sought death to avoid Hippolyte, now in the face of death she desires him with a pang stronger than remorse. She has not mentioned redress. Her breath fades in exhaustion, and Oenone begins to argue with her :

Regardez d'un autre oeil une excusable erreur.

Her one thought is to save from death. She will accept life of any sort for Phèdre, reduce the individual conscience to its lowest average to accommodate her beloved. It is servility to her own desire but servility at its most disinterested.

La foiblesse aux humains n'est que trop naturelle.

But not to acquiesce in it is equally natural to Phèdre. That

is the sharpest distinction between them and it prevents Oenone from merging into an aspect of Phèdre's own nature, as is sometimes said of her. Phèdre has a moment of acquiescence, but it is not a confusion of standards ; her acquiescence is lit by shamed acknowledgment of her degradation. That is what makes it the most painful moment in the play. But now Phèdre will not endure that sense of shame. Before, she bore it in the hope of happiness. Now there is nothing. Her life is laid waste here, before she knows of Hippolyte's death ; before, as his appearance in the next act reveals, it has occurred. It is wrong to assert that she takes poison because she has learnt of Hippolyte's death. It is not clear whether she knows of it or not when Thésée tells her ; she speaks of his innocence and says nothing of his death. She would die infinitely less guilty if he had been saved, but she would die none the less. Is it to be imagined that Phèdre could live even were Hippolyte saved ? As in Scene 3 of the third act before the question of his fate arose, so here before she knows it is decided, she finds her life intolerable. Phèdre, no longer ridden by hope or jealousy, will not live debased in her own eyes. For what should she live, the satisfaction of Oenone ? Phèdre rises up in imprecation and annihilates Oenone with blame. To her " lâches adresses " she owes not indeed her passion but its full irrevocable expression. When all her life became reduced to passion, she would have fled from life. Oenone recalled her, made her forget her duty. She had avoided Hippolyte, Oenone suggested the interview. While it is true that Phèdre accepts Oenone's suggestions, she never accepts the point of view that inspires them, and they do not make her forget her duty. She even exaggerates her departure from it, and what she has done seems to her more terrible than worse crimes committed by others, since this one has been committed by her, once unable to contemplate such a thing. Oenone had not made wrong seem right, she had made it seem possible. Now, at last, Phèdre speaks of what had sent her to Thésée.

## PHÈDRE

Oenone took it upon herself to slander Hippolyte and perhaps his death will come of it, perhaps he is already dead. At this thought she curses her. Oenone is left alone on the stage. She has lived in utter submission to her devotion to Phèdre, not hesitated to sacrifice everything else in her nature to it. She loves Phèdre and betrays her. She has here, having lost and harmed what she loved most, two lines that have been considered unnecessary but serve to stress the relationship between them :

Ah, Dieux ! pour la servir j'ai tout fait, tout quitté ;  
Et j'en reçois ce prix ? Je l'ai bien mérité.

Her love drives her to sin and she is punished for it. She has not understood Phèdre. Love does not imply understanding anywhere in this play, in Phèdre for Hippolyte, Oenone for Phèdre, even Aricie for Hippolyte.

It has been considered an error in Racine to have let Hippolyte appear again, that the news of his death would be more effective if it followed on the meeting with his father. His death is recounted amply enough, and followed by the last entry of Phèdre, its cause. Everything is considered primarily in its relationship to her. Hippolyte's function in the play is to stir passion in Phèdre, Aricie's to motivate her jealousy and Thésée's her guilt and shame. It is the view of Phèdre's death and Phèdre's tragedy that matters to Racine in the last act, and the elaborate recital of Hippolyte's disaster, apart from being demanded by tradition, impresses the listeners on the stage so that the maximum hostility awaits Phèdre and those to whom she speaks her last words give all their pity to another. Through all the account of Hippolyte, the listeners in the audience await Phèdre — this is what she has done, this what she must bear. The thought of her is present throughout the whole fifth act.

Hippolyte's version of his plight has been told to Aricie off-stage. She does not readily understand his inborn delicacy and urges him to enlighten Thésée. To Hippolyte Phèdre's love is a



## A NEW VIEW OF THE PLAYS OF RACINE

noisome thing that pollutes thought, that he can hardly contemplate himself and has confided to her as to his inmost being :

Je n'ai pu vous cacher, jugez si je vous aime,  
Tout ce que je voulois me cacher à moi-même.

What Phèdre had so long kept secret is revealed by Hippolyte to her rival. Hippolyte feels secure in his innocence and sure of Phèdre's punishment. He trusts the equity of the gods. In spite of Racine's suggestion in the preface that Hippolyte is made by his love a little guilty towards his father and is not completely undeserving of his fate, this is not felt to be so in the play. The Greek Hippolytus defies Venus, ignores a law of human nature, and his idealism is preserved at the cost of his life. But Hippolyte in Racine's play is an unfortunate tool, as Phædra in the Greek play. It cannot be said that his fine reticence alone destroys him, Thésée's reception of what he did say makes it doubtful that he would have been believed. He does not deserve his death. In a sense, his purity may be said to have caused it. His reticence is but a manifestation of that whole scrupulousness towards life which made him ill at ease at his father's approach and strengthened suspicion against him. And his purity had helped to win the love of Phèdre. Psychologically, it contributes towards the disaster. Philosophically, it does not. The nature of Hippolyte makes his fate more probable, it does not make it more just. He succeeds in wounding the monster sent against him and is dragged to death by his own horses. It is the sort of death to which his desire to emulate Thésée would in any case expose him. But he dies now, that Thésée, and above all that Phèdre, may be guilty of his death.

In contrast to Phèdre's passion comes Aricie's prim restraint. Hippolyte has misunderstood the reason for her hesitation :

Sur les pas d'un banni craignez-vous de marcher ?

and he in turn is given occasion to enlighten her and must say :

Un plus noble dessein m'amène devant vous.

## PHÈDRE

He knows a temple where false vows are taken only on pain of death. Aricie agrees to follow him.

Thésée enters, troubled by doubt yet unwilling to believe what he is told of Phèdre. His anguish mounts during the following scenes and he has suffered to the limit of his endurance through Phèdre when she appears. It has been remarked that Aricie's first and last words to Thésée are lies. He, practised in gallantry, is gallant towards Aricie. The scene has been said to have been devised in order to give time for Hippolyte's death to occur. The time, in any case, is improbably short. This is equally true of events off-stage in the other plays. A criticism of the same nature is that which complains of Aricie's failure to summon Thésée to the avenging temple. Those are standards which may profitably be applied to a detective story. Racine is concerned with spiritual reality. His treatment of physical fact seldom impairs that. The test of his workmanship is there. And at any rate mere change of scene may be taken as a brief time lapse. The main purpose of this scene is to show Thésée's state of mind and to develop the result of Phèdre's passion. His reception of Aricie's warning, which contains the only fine lines in this scene, does not encourage her to reveal their plans in the hope that he would admit doubt by agreeing to a trial. The Greek Theseus indignantly refused his son's request to do so.

Thésée is shown as the victim of his own nature. When Aricie has gone his anguish doubles, he seems to feel the catastrophe approach. Even now it is Oenone, not Phèdre, for whom he sends. But Oenone is dead, engulfed in the deep sea :

Dans la profonde mer Oenone s'est lancée.

And Phèdre, alternately embracing her children and thrusting them from her, has tried three times to write and three times destroyed the letter. Now Thésée lifts his trembling hands to retract :

Et j'ai trop tôt vers toi levé mes mains cruelles.

but too late. Théràmène's account of the death of Hippolyte is a brilliant accomplishment in verse. It admirably fulfils its purpose, which is not to show a man rendered inarticulate by grief but to give reality to the cause of his grief, and to make Thésée share it.

Thésée regrets his son, guilty or not, as soon as he is dead. He loves and mourns him, and would be confirmed in error to the end rather than bear added grief. He would go, asking nothing more of the gods :

Et je m'en vais pleurer leurs faveurs meurtrières,

suspecting Phèdre but not desiring to be shown a hideous truth. Phèdre may go free, if she can, as Oenone wished. Thésée asks nothing of her. She confesses to his great hurt what he is unwilling to hear, leaving him no escape from remorse, no consolatory doubt. Thésée's love for Hippolyte does not demand his vindication. Nothing but a need of her nature compels Phèdre, having taken poison, to confess. Her life is running out as she speaks and it is with her last strength that she confesses to her husband what Oenone had so fatally concealed. She has as little pity for Oenone as for herself. The most tragic irony attends her death. Before she dies she is forced to accept every bitterness that she had sought to escape in death, and she confesses now not to prevent disaster, to ask pardon or to do penance, but to make what restitution she can to Hippolyte, to do what is fitting and with her last breath distinguish between the pure and the impure. As it is Néron's nature to dissemble, it is hers to make this distinction, and, her eyes half veiled in death, she makes it still. It might be said that she makes it to no purpose in her lifetime and that it serves no purpose here. But there is a loveliness and calm about Phèdre's death, for although her love of purity has not saved her, she has saved it. It is this that gives her tragic greatness beyond the understanding of Hippolyte, Thésée or Oenone, and because of this she suffers, confesses and dies, uncomforted and unknown.

## PHÈDRE

Her conception of life has brought her nothing but pain but she has asserted its reality. Her passion has run its course, harming all about her, Thésée, Hippolyte, Oenone, Aricie, even Théràmène, but not this. It survives the destruction it has failed to avert and perishes in Phèdre only with the life of which it is a part. Her last words bear memorable witness to it, striking all the more deeply for Thésée's harsh but natural comment on her death :

D'une action si noire  
Que ne peut avec elle expirer la mémoire !

The last eight lines of the play have been considered unnecessary and they are undistinguished in themselves and make a less effective ending from the theatrical point of view, but an end typical of her whole struggle. They contain a last irony. This helpless thing that will not die in Phèdre, that she obeys with no sense of attainment, and that Thésée does not see in her, forces upon him what he had shrunk from, and enables him to do what he considers just, and make what little reparation is possible. He accepts her view and does not know it as hers.

## Esther

1689

*ESTHERS* is slight but exquisite. The famous "silence" of twelve years which separates it from *Phèdre* does not weigh on Racine. His verse is limpid in *Esther*, in *Phèdre* undercurrents of association were swirling beneath every sound. Fewer memories stir in this play, yet the "local colour" is never more exactly given. Racine's play is in perfect keeping with the wealth of lore that surrounds the biblical narrative, although of course he has not used all of it.

What seems strikingly modern in *Esther* is the portrayal of the unchanging position of the Jew in exile. Not only the attitude but the very words of the immaculate persecutor are the same :

On verra l'innocent discerné du coupable.

Je n'en perdrai pas moins ce peuple abominable.

The history of the play is given in the preface. Racine changes the scene from one part of Assuérus's palace to another for the greater entertainment of the children who were to perform. But the chorus of this "espèce de poème où le chant fût mêlé avec le récit" was not put in only for the sake of the schoolgirls who could sing, it was a thought Racine had long had to "lier, comme dans les anciennes tragédies grecques, le chœur et le chant avec l'action. . . ." Racine chose the story of Esther because it could serve to teach love of God and "le détachement du monde au milieu du monde même", and because it was not necessary to alter to any extent the circumstances as

## ESTHER

found in the Bible. In *Athalie* he treats his sources more freely.

Esther opens the play by greeting her newly found friend Elise, to whom she describes the manner in which she was chosen to replace Assuérus's wife Vashti. She does not enjoy her sudden elevation :

Esther, disois-je, Esther dans la pourpre est assise,  
La moitié de la terre à son sceptre est soumise,  
Et de Jérusalem l'herbe cache les murs !

She lives quietly :

Lasse de vains honneurs, et me cherchant moi-même.

The young Jewish girls who are growing up under her guidance flock in, and, at Esther's bidding, sing a song of exile.

Mardochée, Esther's guardian, approaches and announces the condemnation of the Jews. Aman has persuaded the king to sign an edict against the Jews on general grounds :

Il nous croit en horreur à toute la nature.

Le fer ne connoîtra ni le sexe ni l'âge ;  
Tout doit servir de proie aux tigres, aux vautours ;

Mardochée tells Esther to go to Assuérus and reveal that she is a member of the condemned race. Esther is afraid, for to approach the king unbidden may mean death. Mardochée with many a line that reaches its full splendour in *Athalie* rebukes her :

Dieu parle, et d'un mortel vous craignez le courroux !

Esther decrees a three days' fast for the Jews and agrees to go. Esther is left alone and prays aloud, a direct and moving prayer that gives the impression of man calling on God more forcefully than the charming verses of the chorus, filled as they are with parallelism and melody. Esther addresses God :

O mon souverain Roi !  
Me voici donc tremblante et seule devant toi.  
Mon père mille fois m'a dit dans mon enfance  
Qu'avec nous tu juras une sainte alliance. . . .

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She makes a personal appeal first, endeavours to make contact, then develops the broader issues involved in the destruction of the Jews. Elise said with satisfaction :

Et le Persan superbe est aux pieds d'une Juive.

Esther has an unconscious contempt for the heathen : " ce fier lion qui ne te connoît pas ". The chorus closes the act, singing of their youth and innocence and calling on the god of battle.

Aman appears in the next act, coming before daybreak to learn the secrets of the palace from his friend Hydaspe. It is interesting to compare Masefield's circumstantial account of the king's dream with Racine's sparser, more suggestive, one. Aman is disturbed by what he hears. His success is a torment to him. He feels himself

Haï, craint, envié, souvent plus misérable

Que tous les malheureux que mon pouvoir accable ?

Aman is the only character in Racine who enjoys the outward marks of authority for their own sake alone. Formerly a slave, he cannot endure the sight of independence in others. His resentment of Mardochée has become an obsession :

L'insolent devant moi ne se courba jamais.

En vain de la faveur du plus grand des monarques

Tout révere à genoux les glorieuses marques.

Lorsque d'un saint respect tous les Persans touchés

N'osent lever leurs fronts à la terre attachés,

Lui, fièrement assis, et la tête immobile,

Traite tous ces honneurs d'impiété servile,

Présente à mes regards un front séditieux,

Et ne daigneroit pas au moins baisser les yeux.

Du palais cependant il assiège la porte :

A quelque heure que j'entre, Hydaspe, ou que je sorte,

Son visage odieux m'afflige et me poursuit ;

Et mon esprit troublé le voit encor la nuit.

Ce matin j'ai voulu devancer la lumière :

Je l'ai trouvé couvert d'une affreuse poussière,

Revêtu de lambeaux, tout pâle. Mais son œil

Conservoit sous la cendre encor le même orgueil.

## ESTHER

He is filled with an almost insane desire to kill. Mardochée's indifferent brow blights his life :

Je gouverne l'empire où je fus acheté.  
Mes richesses des rois égalent l'opulence.  
Environné d'enfants, soutiens de ma puissance,  
Il ne manque à mon front que le bandeau royal.  
Cependant, des mortels aveuglement fatal !  
De cet amas d'honneurs la douceur passagère  
Fait sur mon cœur à peine une atteinte légère ;  
Mais Mardochée, assis aux portes du palais,  
Dans ce cœur malheureux enfonce mille traits ;  
Et toute ma grandeur me devient insipide,  
Tandis que le soleil éclaire ce perfide.

Hydaspe reminds him that the Jews have only ten days more to live and Aman sighs :

Ah ! que ce temps est long à mon impatience !

It is the intransigence of Mardochée which has brought down this vengeance on all the race. Aman cannot be satisfied by the death of one man. The first of the line he says :

Je veux qu'on dise un jour aux siècles effrayés :  
Il fut des Juifs. . . .

Strangely enough, Racine has not made it a racial hatred in the case of Aman. It is a matter of vanity and greed and nothing more romantic :

Mais, crois-moi, dans le rang où je suis élevé,  
Mon âme, à ma grandeur toute entière attachée,  
Des intérêts du sang est foiblement touchée.

Aman has little to learn :

Jé les peignis puissants, riches, séditieux ;  
Leur dieu même ennemi de tous les autres dieux.  
" Jusqu'à quand souffre-t-on que ce peuple respire,  
Et d'un culte profane infecte votre empire ?  
Étrangers dans la Perse, à nos lois opposés,  
Du reste des humains ils semblent divisés,



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N'aspirent qu'à troubler le repos où nous sommes,  
Et détestés partout, détestent tous les hommes.  
Prévenez, punissez leurs insolents efforts ;  
De leur dépouille enfin grossissez vos trésors."

They are discussing a gallows for Mardochée when Assuérus advances, meditating on the portion of the annals of his reign which has just been read aloud to distract him from his strange dreams. It concerned an attempt on his life of which he had been warned in good time. Assuérus asks what reward the faithful servant received and a practised courtier tells him :

On lui promet beaucoup : c'est tout ce que j'ai su.

When Assuérus learns who has saved him he is shocked but recovers himself :

Un Juif m'a préservé du glaive des Persans ?  
Mais puisqu'il m'a sauvé, quel qu'il soit, il n'importe.

Assuérus has been described as the man who discarded his wife on the advice of his ministers and his minister on the advice of his wife. He sends now for "quelque grand de ma cour". Aman enters and Assuérus asks how he should honour a man of merit, and Aman thinking himself the man in question gives the well-known reply that shows his love of display :

Je voudrais donc, Seigneur, que ce mortel heureux,  
De la pourpre aujourd'hui paré comme vous-même,  
Et portant sur le front le sacré diadème,  
Sur un de vos coursiers pompeusement orné,  
Aux yeux de vos sujets dans Suse fût mené. . . .

Assuérus bids him do so to Mardochée. When he is alone Assuérus murmurs :

Mais plus la récompense est grande et glorieuse,  
Plus même de ce Juif la race est odieuse. . . .

Esther enters trembling and falls unconscious before Assuérus. He speaks graciously, and she with an excessive terror that takes

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hold of Assuérus himself. He loves Esther for the sense of security she has given him :

Tout respire en Esther l'innocence et la paix.  
Du chagrin le plus noir elle écarte les ombres,  
Et fait des jours sereins de mes jours les plus sombres.  
Que dis-je ? sur ce trône assis auprès de vous,  
Des astres ennemis j'en crains moins le courroux. . . .

Esther makes her request and it is granted. She is to be permitted to entertain Assuérus and Aman. Assuérus goes to consult the wise men of Chaldea about his evil dreams and Esther accompanies him, bidding the chorus await her return. They comment on the situation and praise God :

Que ma bouche et mon cœur, et tout ce que je suis,  
Rendent honneur au Dieu qui m'a donné la vie.  
    Dans les craintes, dans les ennuis,  
    En ses bontés mon âme se confie.  
Veut-il par mon trépas que je le glorifie ?  
Que ma bouche et mon cœur, et tout ce que je suis,  
Rendent honneur au Dieu qui m'a donné la vie.

Zarès, Aman's wife, endeavours to calm his anger by quoting his own words to him :

Quiconque ne sait pas dévorer un affront,  
Ni de fausses couleurs se déguiser le front,  
Loin de l'aspect des rois qu'il s'écarte, qu'il fuie.  
Il est des contre-temps qu'il faut qu'un sage essuie.  
Souvent avec prudence un outrage enduré  
Aux honneurs les plus hauts a servi de degré.

But Aman is crazed by the humiliation of leading Mardochée clad in the royal purple through the crowded streets and imagines that everyone mocked him and foretold his downfall, and that this was the king's purpose. Zarès continues to be infuriatingly reasonable and Aman, in one of the most interesting speeches in the play, replies :

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Il sait qu'il me doit tout, et que pour sa grandeur  
J'ai foulé sous les pieds remords, crainte, pudeur ;  
Qu'avec un cœur d'airain exerçant sa puissance,  
J'ai fait taire les lois et gémir l'innocence.

He has not received the reward of his labour. Zarès sees no purpose in self-deception and does not spare her husband :

Seigneur, nous sommes seuls. Que sert de se flatter ?  
Ce zèle que pour lui vous fîtes éclater,  
Ce soin d'immoler tout à son pouvoir suprême,  
Entre nous, avoient-ils d'autre objet que vous-même ?  
Et sans chercher plus loin, tous ces Juifs désolés,  
N'est-ce pas à vous seul que vous les immolez ?

Zarès, like Assuérus, fears the changing stars of fortune and suggests flight before it is too late. But it is already too late. Aman is summoned to the banquet and goes contentedly, having heard that Assuérus, informed by the seers that Esther's life is threatened by a perfidious stranger, suspects the Jews.

The chorus, having spoken of the cruelty of Aman, sings such verses as

O repos ! O tranquillité !  
O d'un parfait bonheur assurance éternelle,  
Quand la suprême autorité  
Dans ses conseils a toujours auprès d'elle  
La justice et la vérité !

Assuérus enters with Esther, asking her with the impulsiveness that afflicts him :

Dans quel sein vertueux avez-vous pris naissance ?  
and before she can reply bidding her tell him what she desires that he may grant it, were it half of his kingdom. She kneels before him and asks for the life of her people. Aman exclaims to hear that she is Jewish and Assuérus cries out :

Vous la fille d'un Juif ? Hé quoi ? tout ce que j'aime,  
Cette Esther, l'innocence et la sagesse même,

Dans cette source impure auroit puisé ses jours ?

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Before she introduces her God to Assuérus in a line with the comprehensiveness and wonderful simplicity of expression that characterize *Athalie*, Esther speaks of what the King of Persia is more capable of understanding, and respecting :

Ces Juifs, dont vous voulez délivrer la nature,  
Que vous croyez, Seigneur, le rebut des humains,  
D'une riche contrée autrefois souverains,  
Pendant qu'ils n'adorent que le Dieu de leurs pères  
Ont vu bénir le cours de leurs destins prospères.  
Ce Dieu, maître absolu de la terre et des cieux,  
N'est point tel que l'erreur le figure à vos yeux.  
L'Éternel est son nom. Le monde est son ouvrage.

She reviews the past, carefully blaming Assuérus for nothing and Aman for as much as possible, until she comes to the feud between Aman and Mardochée, whom she describes as

Plein d'une juste horreur pour un Amalécite.

Assuérus sends for Mardochée and withdraws, leaving the chorus, Esther, and Aman on the stage. At once Aman tries to adopt a more profitable policy and offers his experience as a bribe :

Le Roi, vous le voyez, flotte encore interdit.  
Je sais par quels ressorts on le pousse, on l'arrête ;  
Et fais, comme il me plaît, le calme et la tempête.  
Les intérêts des Juifs déjà me sont sacrés.  
Parlez : vos ennemis, aussitôt massacrés,  
Victimes de la foi que ma bouche vous jure,  
De ma fatale erreur répareront l'injure.  
Quel sang demandez-vous ?

Esther refuses his offer and Aman kneels before her and abases himself. He is the vilest creature in Racine's plays, not the most wicked but the most worthless, without sincerity, dignity or even intelligence :

Par le salut des Juifs, par ces pieds que j'embrasse,  
Par ce sage vieillard, l'honneur de votre race,  
Daignez d'un roi terrible apaiser le courroux.  
Sauvez Aman, qui tremble à vos sacrés genoux.

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It is an error to consider Aman a purely comic figure. Revolting and ridiculous as he is, he is exactly observed and portrayed without exaggeration. He causes not mirth but embarrassment, he is so nearly outside humanity yet of it. The first of a long line, he speaks of "une haine implacable" in his victims while they are still in danger because of him. Assuérus returns and condemns him with the disconcerting ease that he had shown in condemning the Jews. Mardochée's place on the gallows is assigned to Aman, Aman's position is given to Mardochée. The bloodshed that ends the story and that Racine has been congratulated for not stressing,

Je leur livre le sang de tous leurs ennemis,

serves to make this gratifying exchange less precarious for Mardochée and is at least not motivated by vainglory or greed. The end of Aman is described with a strange lack of squeamishness, considering that a schoolgirl was to recite the lines.

The play is closed by the chorus, which praises God and rejoices in its liberty. The verses are moving :

Ton Dieu n'est plus irrité.  
Réjouis-toi, Sion, et sors de la poussière.  
Quitte les vêtements de ta captivité,  
Et reprends ta splendeur première.

Les chemins de Sion à la fin sont ouverts.  
Rompez vos fers,  
Tribus captives.  
Troupes fugitives,  
Repassez les monts et les mers.  
Rassemblez-vous des bouts de l'univers.

The fluid, musical verse of *Esther* gives delight, and the play is interesting for its penetrating sketches, rather than studies of character. Racine may give a mere outline of character but he is never superficial in his psychology. For Racine, individuality is not caught up in a mosaic of detail, but a thing dwelling in

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the essence and there independent of time, place and circumstances though conditioned by them. For Racine individuality appears to be present in the minimum form of humanity. Far from giving types, his simplification shows individuality as a fundamental.

## Athalie

1691

RACINE had written his first biblical play, *Esther*, in reply to Mme de Maintenon's request for "some kind of moral or historical poem from which love should be entirely banished". It was twelve years since his last play had appeared, where Phèdre, whose passion and whose purity are equally exacting and who tries in vain to sacrifice one of them, may die only when she feels herself bereft of both. Racine had left the theatre, possibly because of his sins, possibly because of his enemies. He had returned to the faith of Port-Royal and had married Catherine de Romanet, who, it is said, had neither seen nor read any of his plays. *Esther*, like *Athalie* two years later, was to be played by the schoolgirls of Saint-Cyr. Mme de Maintenon wrote to Racine to say: "Our little girls have just played *Andromaque* so well that they will never play it or any of your plays again". *Esther* was considered more suitable. The play is full of music and easy piety, and although it is by the grace of God that the poor and lovely maiden prevails over the great and cruel king, and Racine stresses this, in essence, it is one of the world's most romantic stories. In the background we have all the usual political pessimism of Racine, the waiting mob dependent for its life on the whim of the great powers of state who are, indeed, shown to be dependent on God, but less convincingly ruled than ruling. In other plays, in *Bérénice*, in *Britannicus*, the mob was itself, potentially, a power of state. In *Esther* it seems particularly helpless. It is essentially a captive

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mob. The play is often dismissed as being not a drama but an opera, and this is unjust. But it is overshadowed by *Athalie*.

The plot of *Athalie* is based on the brief account given in 2 Kings viii-xi and 2 Chronicles xxi-xxiii. Athaliah is the daughter of the better-known Jezebel and of Ahab, King of Israel. She married Joram, son of Jehoshaphat, sixth king of Judah in lineal descent from David, and persuaded him to set up a temple of Baal in Jerusalem. Great misfortunes then befell the kingdom. All the royal children except Ahaziah were killed and Jehoram died of an incurable disease. On the death of her son King Ahaziah, Athaliah killed all the seed royal of the house of Judah and usurped the throne. But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of King Jehoram by another mother and wife of Jehoiada the High Priest, saved Ahaziah's son Joash from Athaliah and he was hidden in the Temple for six years. In the seventh year Jehoiada had Joash declared king, and when Athaliah, drawn by the acclamation, came to the Temple to cry treason, Jehoiada ordered her death.

Racine likes a background swept clear of trifles, a palace or a temple, full of light and space and great poetic symbols of what is most significant in life. He refuses petty interruptions of the swift line of development that constitutes the action of his play. In this way, no one is less a realist. In a lesser poet the absence of so much reality would mean the absence of truth. In Racine the swift unimpeded progress to an inevitable end often makes people see his characters as inhumanly ferocious, as legends of intense love or hate or jealousy. This comes from not accepting the conditions of his art, the art of his period as well as of his individuality, from not being tuned into his medium. He must have a special form of attention, as a radio play must be attended to in a way different from that required for a stage play, or as a slow-motion picture of a horse jumping is minutely true, yet for a moment bewildering and unreal. Racine's art at once intensifies and disguises his realism. It



removes us from the conditions of ordinary life and at the same time shows us what they are made of with dazzling clarity. The thoughts and half-thoughts of life are given visible form in action, while the causes of the thoughts, the external circumstances, are disguised by the conventional forms of classical tragedy, the legendary kings and queens and threadbare stories of antiquity.

In the last play he wrote, Racine is a realist in exactly the same way, and as great a poet in the presentation of his background. *Athalie* is a biblical play in the sense that Racine's sources were no longer Roman history or Greek antiquity but the Old Testament. It is religious just as *Phèdre* is religious, and in no other way. Racine has used the Bible much as he used Greek mythology, to illuminate the tenants of his mind. His *Phèdre* is not found in Euripides or in Seneca or in Garnier, although he has been influenced by all of them. The facts of the story are for Racine the visible framework which shows up the fibre of the soul, bruises and then destroys it. He alters the traditional story only when it would not otherwise accommodate the Racinian character.

The prophecy in *Athalie*, like the oracle in *Iphigénie*, leaves the characters a choice of action. In *Athalie* man still gropes in the dark, in spite of Joad's prophecy, and *Athalie*'s dream, usually held to be the pivot of the action, sets events in motion but decides nothing. It has very much the same function as the unfavourable winds in *Iphigénie*, or the false report of the king's death in *Phèdre* and *Mithridate*. It does not force the characters to act as they do, it gives them an opportunity of showing what they are in the revealing light of certain specially selected circumstances. The circumstances are thrust upon the actors by God or fate, in *Athalie* as in the other plays. But the circumstances, once given, the characters are free to react to them as they will, limited only by the additional circumstance of their own natures. It is only in this sense that God is respon-

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sible for the action of *Athalie*. Man in *Athalie* does not behave any better than in the other plays of Racine. God is no more accessible to him, in spite of the dream and the prophecy. It is the most moral of Racine's plays, because the law of cause and effect, established by God and not always calculable, is shown to redress the balance of justice; but it is no more religious than any tragedy which offers the spectacle of man in his relationship with the infinite; and the infinite in *Athalie* is not dated, but the infinite as it confronts man to-day. They are wrong who think that *Athalie* offers an outmoded view of life.

Probably no piece of literature of the same length covers a vaster area of thought or gives such a clear reflection of so many aspects of reality. The play is, first of all, like all the tragedies of Racine, a drama of time and space, happening in the world of fact, where it is vitally important that *Athalie* is inside the Temple and her soldiers are outside it and the door is locked between them. Behind these concrete indisputable facts, behind the world of matter, there are two determining forces. There is the mind of man, responsible to some extent for his actions, and there is God responsible to whatever extent He ordains, for the mind of man. Psychology is referred to philosophy for further explanation. And whatever the philosophical intention, whether or not Racine absolves man and accuses God, the political result is the same. The fate of vast politically inert masses of the populace is dependent on the will, ability and fortune of one person. It is a study of dictatorship as a form of government. On the political result of all the various factors depends the preservation of an idea which is essential to the progress of civilization, as well as of great religious importance. Whether Joad acts according to the principles he upholds or not, the principles are infinitely wiser and more pure than the idol-worship of *Athalie*. The mob mind in his own day, to which he contemptuously refers, even if blindly obedient, will benefit by his victory and the future will have a better inheritance than if he had been defeated.

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Throughout the play there is mention of a universal God dispensing justice and kindness to all creatures and directing their destinies according to their merits as revealed in their actions, for which we are therefore justified in concluding they have to accept personal responsibility. Joad expresses this belief. It is the subject of his last speech and it is kept in mind throughout by the chorus. At the opening of the play Abner refers to the Will of God as revealed in the Law. If man is held responsible, as he is in this play, for his actions, and rewarded accordingly, then fate in this play, as in all the others, works through character. It has still to be decided what part is played by miracles, if any. Man, in any case, is made directly responsible for the working-out of his destiny. But is not character destiny? In this play, too, the philosophical background is the old problem of free-will and predestination. Racine is treating a Bible story and inevitably consciousness of God is more than before evident in the play. But there is no undue limitation of the activity of the characters as human beings for the sake of demonstrating the omnipotence of God. The outcome of the action is due, directly due, to the characters of the actors, and not to unusual divine intervention. But characters are shown more clearly than ever before to be fatality, and the question is more pointedly and relentlessly put, not, this time, are the gods jealous, but is God just? Phèdre is pagan and she seeks help in the entrails of slaughtered cattle and finds only the thought of Hippolyte, the reflection of her own mind. The Jews lived in intimate relationship with their God, often disobedient but ever mindful of Him. The action of the play takes place on the anniversary of the day on which the Law was given, an occasion still annually celebrated by the race. Racine remarks that the choice of this feast gave him greater variety for the subject matter of his chorus. He also points out that the Bible does not show Joïada, or Joad, to have had prophetic visions, but that he has drawn the substance of his vision from the words of the

prophets, of which in his capacity of High Priest Joad may have been one.

Abner, to whom obedience is as natural as authority to Joad, opens the play. Of all his evocation of past glories, God the Eternal praised by the generations for the yearly harvest, streaming endlessly into the Temple hung with flowers, and the priests too few for the profusion of offerings, and his comprehensive account of the present, the Temple deserted by the docile multitude, the small number still faithful, the renegades who serve Baal, and his fear of what Athalie may yet do, Joad selects the most important point, the only one on which he is not fully informed and which may affect the future :

D'où vous vient aujourd'hui ce noir pressentiment ?

Abner has many reasons for his anxiety, some of long standing, one dating from yesterday. " Dès longtemps " Athalie has detested in Joad his personal qualities as well as his office and in the faithful Josabet her royal blood. Apart from this, Mathan the renegade, whose constant purpose it is to " anéantir le Dieu qu'il a quitté ", is employing every means in his power to bring Athalie to action. He tries to destroy Joad by praising him to the queen, he pretends to pity him, he appeals to her fear and to her greed. Lately, Athalie has fallen into a sombre mood and only yesterday Abner saw her :

Lancer sur le lieu saint des regards furieux,  
Comme si dans le fond de ce vaste édifice  
Dieu cachoit un vengeur armé pour son supplice.

Joad knows that the time may come when this will appear to have been indeed so. Abner fears lest " de Jézabel la fille sanguinaire " should pursue her course to the sanctuary of God. Not so Joad.

Celui qui met un frein à la fureur des flots  
Sait aussi des méchants arrêter les complots.  
Soumis avec respect à sa volonté sainte,  
Je crains Dieu, cher Abner, et n'ai point d'autre crainte.

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There is nothing more impressive in the world than one who can say with truth what Joad has said. If Athalie is jealous it is with reason, for here is the most unassailable power, a liberty that places beyond the command of all earthly princes. He briefly thanks Abner for his warning and rebukes him for his passive faith :

La foi qui n'agit point, est-ce une foi sincère ?

Abner had been a faithful servant to Jehoshaphat, Joram and Ahaziah, and now a usurper is being given the benefit of his good generalship. He had spoken of the abundant sacrifices of the past and Joad chides him in the words of Isaiah :

Ai-je besoin du sang des boucs et des génisses ?

He demands action from Abner, who complains : " Hé ! que puis-je. . . ." He repeats the general view, which is, to a certain extent, his own, as Joad does not fail to realize. God has abandoned them, the miracles have ceased and the holy ark is silent. Joad, addressing him twice by name, reminds him of the miracles witnessed in their days, the destruction of Achab and Jezebel, the miracles performed by Elisha and by Elijah — he thinks of the more recent first. God has not forgotten them. But Abner is not convinced. The race of David is extinct :

Athalie étouffa l'enfant même au berceau.

Les morts, après huit ans, sortent-ils du tombeau ?

How can God's promise be fulfilled, when the means has perished ? If only one member of the house of David had survived — Joad breaks in : " Hé bien ! que feriez-vous ? " and hears Abner's declaration of loyalty with which he associates the people at large. Joad, who has come to the decision that he will reveal to Josabet, answers mysteriously : " Je ne m'explique point ", and bids him return later when God may be seen to have kept faith. Now he must go, for the festival is dawning :

Et du temple déjà l'aube blanchit le faite.

Abner retires on the arrival of Josabet.

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To Josabet the High Priest announces that the time has come to show the young prince she has saved to the nation. He is wise beyond his years and he will be brave. Josabet, who has seen little of Joas for fear of disclosing the secret through excess of love, asks whether the boy knows who he is and is told that he believes himself an abandoned child to whom Joad has "par pitié daigné servir de père". The new king is growing up known only as Eliacin and accustomed to obey and be grateful to the High Priest. Josabet trembles for him, seeing the danger that lies ahead, and asks what allies Joad has provided for him. Has he secured the support of Abner? But Joad tells her that Abner does not yet know of the king's existence. To the power of Athalie he is opposing only the priests, whose number Josabet knows he has doubled. But she feels sure that at the first rumour of a pretender to the throne Athalie will attack the Temple, and she imagines Joas killed in spite of their efforts to save him. Joad beats upon her ears with repetition of the name of God and of His promises :

Et comptez-vous pour rien Dieu qui combat pour nous ?  
Dieu, qui de l'orphelin protège l'innocence,  
Et fait dans la faiblesse éclater sa puissance ;  
Dieu, qui hait les tyrans, et qui dans Jezraël  
Jura d'exterminer Achab et Jézabel ;  
Dieu, qui frappant Joram, le mari de leur fille,  
A jusque sur son fils poursuivi leur famille ;  
Dieu, dont le bras vengeur, pour un temps suspendu,  
Sur cette race impie est toujours étendu ?

But Josabet has vivid memories, too, and is not silenced. This boy is of their family, Jezebel's as well as David's, and who can tell his fate? At the end of the play it is still possible to ask her question :

Qui sait si cet enfant, par leur crime entraîné,  
Avec eux en naissant ne fut pas condamné ?

She remembers how she saw him first, surrounded by the dead, whilst still

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Un poignard à la main, l'implacable Athalie  
Au carnage animoit ses barbares soldats.

She took him from his nurse, she thought him dead, and she felt the baby grip her as she wept over him. She has for him the love of a mother yearning to protect the life she has given from the dangers that life involves. She prays to God as the only father Joas has, and wisely, for Joad does not love him with her human love, although his own children are not more cherished. Like Antigone in *La Thébàide* she asks that she alone may suffer :

Et ne punis que moi de toutes mes foiblesses.

Joad, born to lead, understands emotions he does not share and reassures her. He had addressed her as "Princesse" on her approach. His tenderness now is peculiarly that of a man of authority :

Vos larmes, Josabet, n'ont rien de criminel ;

God, he tells her, does not punish the children for the sins of the parents if the children fear Him. Joas will be accepted as king.

Il faut que sur le trône un roi soit élevé,  
Qui se souviene un jour qu'au rang de ses ancêtres  
Dieu l'a fait remonter par la main de ses prêtres,  
L'a tiré par leur main de l'oubli du tombeau,  
Et de David éteint rallumé le flambeau.

Joas is not only the rightful king but a king who will owe his position to the priests, through whose instrumentality God has raised him to the throne. Joad contemplates the possibility that Joas may be unworthy of his race and abandon the path of David, and prays that if this is to be so the boy may be

comme le fruit en naissant arraché,  
Ou qu'un souffle ennemi dans sa fleur a séché,

but that if he is to be obedient to the Lord and a useful instrument, he may reign. It seems as if the first part of his prayer is asking God to annul His promise should certain circumstances occur,

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for if Joas dies as a child "comme le fruit en naissant" without offspring the line of David will be extinct. But this may be too literal an interpretation of the metaphor and the point arises again. Then Joad prays that confusion may descend upon Athalie and Mathan the renegade who counsels her :

cet esprit d'imprudence et d'erreur,  
De la chute des rois funeste avant-coureur ;

and it is this spirit which is said to make Athalie behave as she does.

The first act is closed by the chorus singing praise to God. The first verses are magnificent, the closing ones weaker. The spaciousness of the opening verses gives scope to the great generalities of Joad's faith, the immeasurable foundations which preceded the birth of time :

Tout l'univers est plein de sa magnificence.  
Qu'on l'adore ce Dieu, qu'on l'invoque à jamais.  
Son empire a des temps précédé la naissance.  
Chantons, publions ses bienfaits.

En vain l'injuste violence  
Au peuple qui le loue imposeroit silence :  
Son nom ne périra jamais.  
Le jour annonce au jour sa gloire et sa puissance.  
Tout l'univers est plein de sa magnificence.  
Chantons, publions ses bienfaits.

Those who find the verse of Racine monotonous should compare the lovely line like a shaft of light :

Et la lumière est un don de ses mains

with :

Le jour annonce au jour sa gloire et sa puissance,

which seems to unroll endlessly. But the references to particular events in the later verses, the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, the manna in the desert, the crossing of the Red Sea, are less successful. Attention is directed to the physically extraordinary in the miracles, the mind lingers on the contrasts



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offered to it. Nevertheless all the miracles have in common the point that they support Joad's faith in God, Who has not abandoned His people in all their perils, and the last verse emphasises this.

Act I presented Joad and his point of view. Act II introduces Athalie. Her works are announced with horror before her name by Zacharie, Joad's son. He comes pale and breathless to tell Josabet : " Le temple est profané ". And yet again when she questions him : " Et du Seigneur l'autel abandonné ". Then he describes the scene, " le grand prêtre mon père " conducting the ceremony, in which appears one of the rare inaccuracies of Racine, the sprinkling of blood on the assembly, and then the unheard-of interruption :

Une femme. . . . Peut-on la nommer sans blasphème ?

Une femme. . . . C'étoit Athalie elle-même.

She advances proudly and the people fly before her. But Joad angrily bids her begone :

" Reine, sors, a-t-il dit, de ce lieu redoutable,

D'où te bannit ton sexe et ton impiété.

Viens-tu du Dieu vivant braver la majesté ? "

And it seems to Zacharie that an angel of God may have flashed his sword before her as she opened her mouth to blaspheme, for suddenly she appeared terror-stricken and remained gazing fixedly at Eliacin. The priests flocked about the two children and they were led away. Josabet immediately fears for Joas, and her young son and daughter are quick to question her about him. They retire on the approach of Athalie.

She comes in, confessing her distress and weakness. She has achieved much, but one thing she desires eludes her and she has come here in search of it. It lures her to her death.

Cette paix que je cherche et qui me fuit toujours.

Abner has followed her to offer excuses for the behaviour of Joad. In doing so his conviction of the reasonableness of the

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High Priest's conduct and the corresponding unreasonableness of the queen's drives him to a sturdy challenge which Athalie hardly deigns to notice :

Hé quoi ? vous de nos rois et la femme et la mère,  
Êtes-vous à ce point parmi nous étrangère ?  
Ignorez-vous nos lois ?

He would take leave of her when Mathan enters, but she does not permit him to do so. She reminds him that he is at her disposal, coldly dismisses his ardent defence of Joad, and gives her view of his religion in four words before she turns to more urgent matters. Her last lines give the essence of Abner's character :

Votre présence, Abner, est ici nécessaire.  
Laissons là de Joad l'audace téméraire,  
Et tout ce vain amas de superstitions  
Qui ferment votre temple aux autres nations.  
Un sujet plus pressant excite mes alarmes.  
Je sais que dès l'enfance élevé dans les armes,  
Abner a le cœur noble, et qu'il rend à la fois  
Ce qu'il doit à son Dieu, ce qu'il doit à ses rois.  
Demeurez.

When Mathan enters she begins her great speech, reviews her reign, giving an account of her position as she sees it, and demands their counsel. Athalie has been a great though tyrannical queen. But she is infinitely reasonable. She is not, as a rule, capricious. She founds opinions on facts ; she can say : " Je puis m'être trompée ". Mathan is surprised when he thinks she is behaving unaccountably. And she has a conception of justice, for vengeance has its connection with justice.

Prêtez-moi l'un et l'autre une oreille attentive.  
Je ne veux point ici rappeler le passé,  
Ni vous rendre raison du sang que j'ai versé.  
Ce que j'ai fait, Abner, j'ai cru le devoir faire.  
Je ne prends point pour juge un peuple téméraire.  
Quoi que son insolence ait osé publier,  
Le ciel même a pris soin de me justifier.

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Sur d'éclatants succès ma puissance établie  
A fait jusqu'aux deux mers respecter Athalie.  
Par moi Jérusalem goûte un calme profond.  
Le Jourdain ne voit plus l'Arabe vagabond,  
Ni l'altier Philistin, par d'éternels ravages,  
Comme au temps de vos rois, désoler ses rivages ;  
Le Syrien me traite et de reine et de sœur.  
Enfin de ma maison le perfide oppresseur,  
Qui devoit jusqu'à moi pousser sa barbarie,  
Jéhu, le fier Jéhu, tremble dans Samarie.  
De toutes parts pressé par un puissant voisin,  
Que j'ai su soulever contre cet assassin,  
Il me laisse en ces lieux souveraine maîtresse.

It is perhaps to reassure herself that she recalls her brilliant achievement. It enables her to feel : " Le ciel même a pris soin de me justifier ". The dream which sends her to the Temple for the first time occurs only when the present no longer fully occupies her powerful mind and the past comes to haunt her in a recurrent dream :

Je jouissois en paix du fruit de ma sagesse.

She says of her dream, outlining a rational cause of its recurrence :

Je l'évite partout, partout il me poursuit.

Athalie describes all the horror that broke upon her sleep, but there are no signs of mental disintegration in what she says, and she is shown taking an objective view of her own distress.

C'étoit pendant l'horreur d'une profonde nuit.  
Ma mère Jézabel devant moi s'est montrée,  
Comme au jour de sa mort pompeusement parée.  
Ses malheurs n'avoient point abattu sa fierté ;  
Même elle avoit encor cet éclat emprunté  
Dont elle eut soin de peindre et d'orner son visage,  
Pour réparer des ans l'irréparable outrage.  
" Tremble, m'a-t-elle dit, fille digne de moi.  
Le cruel Dieu des Juifs l'emporte aussi sur toi.  
Je te plains de tomber dans ses mains redoutables,  
Ma fille." En achevant ces mots épouvantables,

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Son ombre vers mon lit a paru se baisser ;  
Et moi, je lui tendois les mains pour l'embrasser.  
Mais je n'ai plus trouvé qu'un horrible mélange  
D'os et de chair meurtris, et trainés dans la fange,  
Des lambeaux pleins de sang, et des membres affreux  
Que des chiens dévorants se disputoient entre eux.

Then she sees a child in a priest's robe, and as she admires him he suddenly stabs her to the heart. She has given a disturbing reality to the vision that haunts her in its appalling detail, but she remains rational and temperate, and is shown trying to choose between various interpretations of this strange dream which presents first Jezebel warning her, as a worthy daughter, that the cruel God of the Jews will defeat her too, and then showing defeat in the form of a young priest. She knows they may think it without significance ; for a time she herself assigned it to a physical cause. But it pursues her, and she seeks protection first from Baal and then, in the same spirit, from Joad's God :

Dans le temple des Juifs un instinct m'a poussée,  
Et d'apaiser leur Dieu j'ai conçu la pensée :  
J'ai cru que des présents calmeroient son courroux,  
Que ce Dieu, quel qu'il soit, en deviendrait plus doux.

Her presence aroused consternation and anger but she does not pause to resent it, for the crowning horror awaits her ; and in broad daylight, being wide awake, Athalie sees the child of her dream, feature for feature, and dressed in the same robe. She has remained in the Temple with the intention of learning who the young priest is. Abner truthfully tells her that he does not know the boy. Mathan hypocritically tries to show that his view and Joad's are the same in a matter such as this :

Mais lui-même après tout, fût-ce son propre fils,  
Voudrait-il un moment laisser vivre un coupable ?

Abner, who is a soldier, is shocked by the callousness of the false priest, and objects to the murder of a child on such slight evidence : " sur la foi d'un songe ". It is important to remember

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that Athalie's dream left her a choice of conduct. It sent her to the Temple, but not with a dagger. And the figure that stabs her in the dream is in reality to become her avenger and slay her enemy's son. The course Mathan suggests is open to her :

On le craint, tout est examiné.

Est-ce aux rois à garder cette lente justice ?  
Leur sûreté souvent dépend d'un prompt supplice.

She rejects Mathan's suggestion in favour of Abner's more humane advice to inquire further. It is very likely that her motives are less noble than Abner's. She does not want merely to destroy the danger as Mathan advises, she wants to understand it. To kill has not been Athalie's first thought. She wants to investigate. Her reaction is akin to curiosity. To leave no room for evasion she orders that the two children she saw at the altar be brought to her. When Abner hesitates she becomes imperious :

Manqueroit-on pour moi de complaisance ?

Secure in her power she has left the priests unmolested, and she reminds Abner of it :

Je sais sur ma conduite et contre ma puissance  
Jusqu'où de leurs discours ils portent la licence.  
Ils vivent cependant, et leur temple est debout.  
Mais je sens que bientôt ma douceur est à bout.  
Que Joad mette un frein à son zèle sauvage,  
Et ne m'irrite point par un second outrage.  
Allez.

When Abner has left them, Mathan warns Athalie against him. He knows that Abner has visited the Temple before dawn, and

Pour le sang de ses rois vous savez son amour.  
Et qui sait si Joad ne veut point en leur place  
Substituer l'enfant dont le ciel vous menace,  
Soit son fils, soit quelque autre. . . .

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Athalie accepts his interpretation of the dream but still she wishes to see for herself :

Mais je veux de mon doute être débarrassée.

Nevertheless she is not rash and takes the precaution of having her soldiers arm.

When Josabet comes in with the two children Athalie shudders to see that she has made no mistake. Josabet tries to direct her attention to Zacharie but in vain. Athalie questions the boy against Josabet's will and he alone is unafraid and answers candidly. Racine has discussed his age in the preface and made it nine or ten years. It has been said that he would not have dared to give a child such an important part in a play intended to be produced in the theatre. He is "un enfant tout extraordinaire" who has had the benefit of Joad's teaching and is wise beyond his years. But his answers, nevertheless, are disarmingly childish, and their effect on Athalie and on Josabet is all the more painful. He tells her his name and that his parents have abandoned him. He knows no home but the Temple and he was found

Parmi des loups cruels prêts à me dévorer.

She presses further and is told his simple version of the story. Athalie cannot resist what is ingenuous and appealing in the child :

Quel prodige nouveau me trouble et m'embarrasse ?  
La douceur de sa voix, son enfance, sa grâce,  
Font insensiblement à mon inimitié  
Succéder. . . . Je serois sensible à la pitié ?

Abner is bold enough to refer ironically to her dream :

Madame, voilà donc cet ennemi terrible.  
De vos songes menteurs l'imposture est visible,  
A moins que la pitié qui semble vous troubler  
Ne soit ce coup fatal qui vous faisoit trembler.

He is ironical, but the suggestion is given and Athalie's pity may later seem to be in truth "ce coup fatal".

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Josabet, meanwhile, has tried to withdraw with Joas, and Athalie recalls her. She continues her interrogation, and, for all her old cunning at moments, she has a *naïveté* that rivals the child's. She is the heathen conversing with a favoured disciple of a High Priest whose way of ruling is far more subtle than hers. She asks of the commands of God and is informed :

Qu'il résiste au superbe et punit l'homicide.

It is the practical monarch who demands :

Mais tout ce peuple enfermé dans ce lieu,  
A quoi s'occupe-t-il ?

When he replies that they worship God, she inquires :

Dieu veut-il qu'à toute heure on prie, on le contemple ?

It is not only the child Joas who finds all his emotions provided for in the ritual and the Temple life, and Racine has indicated that the seemingly narrow existence can give rise to a considerable variety of feelings. It is the childish delight of Joas to hand the incense to the High Priest, but Mathan covets the censer as the symbol of authority and desires to be first in the Temple as he will desire to be first at court. Joas is not dull in the Temple. When Athalie offers him "de passe-temps plus doux" in her palace, he refuses to go. She would be agreeable and explains :

J'ai mon Dieu que je sers ; vous servirez le vôtre.  
Ce sont deux puissants Dieux ;

but the child is intransigent :

Il faut craindre le mien.  
Lui seul est Dieu, Madame, et le vôtre n'est rien.

She tries again to appeal to the love of pleasure and draws upon herself the implied criticism :

Le bonheur des méchants comme un torrent s'écoule.

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Josabet intervenes at Athalie's : " Ces méchants, qui sont-ils ? " and is held responsible for his opinions. But Athalie still speaks gently to Joas :

J'aime à voir comme vous l'instruisez.  
Enfin, Éliacin, vous avez su me plaire ;  
Vous n'êtes point sans doute un enfant ordinaire.  
Vous voyez, je suis reine, et n'ai point d'héritier.  
Laissez là cet habit, quittez ce vil métier.  
Je veux vous faire part de toutes mes richesses ;  
Essayez dès ce jour l'effet de mes promesses.  
A ma table, partout, à mes côtés assis,  
Je prétends vous traiter comme mon propre fils.

She is attracted by Joas. It is very likely that she would kill him if at any time she felt her position threatened by him, but she is not likely to foresee that possibility at the moment. She feels secure enough to tolerate her enemies. It is Joad who will find it necessary to order her immediate death and bid the Levites

Frappez et Tyriens, et même Israélites.

She may be willing to acknowledge Joas as her heir but Joad and Josabet cannot be expected to entrust him to her and he himself will not accept her. All are tense when he hesitates and slowly says :

Quel père  
Je quitterois ! Et pour . . .  
Pour quelle mère !

Now Athalie turns in anger to Josabet :

Voilà comme infectant cette simple jeunesse,  
Vous employez tous deux le calme où je vous laisse.  
Vous cultivez déjà leur haine et leur fureur ;  
Vous ne leur prononcez mon nom qu'avec horreur.

It is true that she is not known to have resembled her mother Jezebel with regard to religious persecution. Josabet, undaunted, reminds her of her own attitude towards the past :



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“vous-même en faites gloire”, and draws forth *Athalie*’s torrential defence of it. She does not repent ; she does not see how she could have done other than she did. But whatever her view of the past she finds something lacking in the present, and although she sets herself fiercely against the infuriating calm of *Josabet*, who has what *Athalie* desires, she never speaks harshly to *Joas*.

Oui, ma juste fureur, et j’en fais vanité,  
A vengé mes parents sur ma postérité.  
J’aurois vu massacrer et mon père et mon frère,  
Du haut de son palais précipiter ma mère,  
Et dans un même jour égorger à la fois,  
Quel spectacle d’horreur ! quatre-vingts fils de rois :  
Et pourquoi ? pour venger je ne sais quels prophètes,  
Dont elle avoit puni les fureurs indiscretes ;  
Et moi, reine sans cœur, fille sans amitié,  
Esclave d’une lâche et frivole pitié,  
Je n’aurois pas du moins à cette aveugle rage  
Rendu meurtre pour meurtre, outrage pour outrage,  
Et de votre *David* traité tous les neveux  
Comme on traitoit d’*Achab* les restes malheureux ?  
Où serois-je aujourd’hui, si domptant ma foiblesse,  
Je n’eusse d’une mère étouffé la tendresse ;  
Si de mon propre sang ma main versant des flots  
N’eût par ce coup hardi réprimé vos complots ?  
Enfin de votre Dieu l’implacable vengeance  
Entre nos deux maisons rompit toute alliance.  
*David* m’est en horreur ; et les fils de ce roi,  
Quoique nés de mon sang, sont étrangers pour moi.

She refers her conduct to a standard. It was not only right but a sacred duty to avenge her people. It was her “juste fureur” without which she would have been

reine sans cœur, fille sans amitié,  
Esclave d’une lâche et frivole pitié.

She speaks of “domptant ma foiblesse”, and says that she has “d’une mère étouffé la tendresse”. She acted, not without

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difficulty, as she thought to be right. Mathan admits that he was simply "prodigue surtout du sang des misérables". Athalie says:

Ce que j'ai fait, Abner, j'ai cru le devoir faire.

It should be remembered, for Racine remembers it in the play, that Athalie is not a renegade. She came from Sidon. And although her mother married a king of Israel, she never practised his religion. On the contrary, she converted him to hers. Racine shows the renegade Mathan more vindictive than the idolator by birth. The striding line

Rendu meurtre pour meurtre, outrage pour outrage

recalls the appalling picture described by Josabet in the first act. Athalie's crimes are not minimized, and the unnaturalness of them is prominently displayed in the second line of this speech, and she herself is painfully aware of it. She saw in her grandchildren not her own family but political opponents whom she destroyed. When her husband and her children are dead, she is neither wife nor mother but the royal daughter of an enemy kingdom. She takes possession of it ruthlessly, but, in her own eyes, not unjustly. She may, no doubt, be doomed to destruction, as the holder of a base standard of right and wrong. But Racine makes it impossible, or at least extraordinarily difficult, to be complacent at her fate, or indifferent to it, and certainly to rejoice at it. She is barred out by her upbringing and hereditary outlook, doomed as surely as Phèdre is doomed by her ancestry, although not in the same way. Phèdre perishes because she is of the blood of Pasiphaë, her fate is in her blood. Athalie perishes because she is the daughter of Jezebel and doomed by her inherited conception of life to find her enemies in the chosen of God. The action of the play is the matching of the forces of Athalie and of the High Priest Joad, accompanied by all the panoply of their respective environments, until one of them is vanquished.

Within the limits of her heredity *Athalie* is just. Yet she is held to be condemned. It is not permissible to insist that Racine intends her to be considered deserving of her fate because he is a Jansenist and because she is a biblical character, and such is her fate in the Bible. He has commented on a far nobler character than *Athalie*, saying : " Les amis de Job disputent contre lui, et prétendent lui prouver que Dieu l'afflige parce qu'il l'a offensé, étant persuadés, comme le vulgaire, que les afflictions ne doivent point tomber sur le juste ". He commented on Psalm cv : " C'est dans sa colère que Dieu accorde la plupart des choses qu'on désire dans ce monde avec passion ". For Racine, prosperity on earth is not necessarily proof of the approval of God, and the person who most clearly says that it is in the play is *Athalie* :

Le ciel même a pris soin de me justifier.

The significance of a work of art is not always to be limited to the conscious intention of the artist in creating it, but, in any case, Nicole's *Traté de la Grâce générale*, for example, shows that a Jansenist was capable of coming to the point of considering grace available to all men, and, that if it were denied to some the resultant disability would not be accounted guilt. In Racine's first extant play, *La Thébaïde*, as in his last play, *Athalie*, there is questioning of the justice of God, of the ruling of the world. Jocaste pleads her unwillingness to sin, crying :

Voilà de ces grands Dieux la suprême justice,  
Jusques au bord du crime ils conduisent nos pas,  
Ils nous le font commettre, et ne l'excusent pas.

She had sinned in ignorance. In *Andromaque* Oreste feels that sin is man's only vengeance on the unjust gods :

Je ne vois que malheurs qui condamnent les Dieux,  
Méritons leur courroux, justifions leur haine,  
Et que le fruit du crime en précède la peine.

And Phèdre, in whom Port-Royal saw " une juste à qui la grâce

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avoit manqué", accepts her fate but with a sort of regret that she has not received all the wages of sin :

Pardonne. Un Dieu cruel a perdu ta famille ;

Hélas ! du crime affreux dont la honte me suit  
Jamais mon triste cœur n'a recueilli le fruit.

She illustrates the doctrine of the Jansenists but she neither accepts it uncritically nor allows us to do so. We recognize the inevitability of fate but not its justice. Cause is chained to inexorable effect and the victims cry out so eloquently that we are made to feel : "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about ; yet thou dost destroy me", and in these plays there is no reassuring echo back :

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth !  
Declare if thou hast understanding.

The gods remain far off, incomprehensible and greatly feared, but the sinning men and women are drawn closely into the ranks of ordinary humanity, though still, through the miracle of classical art, Phèdre and Athalie, in the magnificence of legend and antiquity. They are not distant strange criminals whom we shun and judge but people terrifying chiefly through their misery and misfortune and a disturbing similarity to ourselves.

Is it the "esprit d'imprudence et d'erreur" which Joad had prayed should descend on Athalie and Mathan that sends Athalie from the Temple without Joas ? Although, like Mathan and Abner and all the priests, she has not realized who Joas is, she had made her offer after Mathan's warning. She does not realize that he has a claim to her position but she has been warned that he may be used to imperil it. It may be that she would offer him as a stranger what she could not bear to give him as her grandson. Her long speech, made only when she has been rebuffed, ends by declaring "de votre Dieu l'implacable vengeance" responsible for the fact that the sons of David,

" Quoique nés de mon sang, sont étrangers pour moi ". Yet in her fear she had come with the hope of appeasing this God, the cause of her hatred of her own family. She meets irreconcilable opposition, although in Josabet it appears in its gentlest form. If Athalie is satisfied with what she has done, very well, Josabet will not argue with her and composedly replies :

Tout vous a réussi. Que Dieu voie, et nous juge.

And Athalie, who is not satisfied and wants to feel that Josabet has no reason to rest assured in the God Who has already judged against her, answers :

Ce Dieu, depuis longtemps votre unique refuge,  
Que deviendra l'effet de ses prédictions ?  
Qu'il vous donne ce roi promis aux nations,  
Cet enfant de David, votre espoir, votre attente . . .  
Mais nous nous reverrons. Adieu. Je sors contente :  
J'ai voulu voir ; j'ai vu.

She has been refused Joas, and as she speaks she may well remember Mathan's suggestion that this child is to be their substitute, this child whom she likes. It is to her interest to remove him, but, apart from any reluctance to take the child against his will, she may not feel in a position to do so, and it will appear that if she had made the attempt it would have been opposed. Abner might or might not have kept his promise to Josabet, but Joad and the Levites, although we are allowed to know it only when the danger is past, were standing guard ready to intervene, in spite of the knowledge that they might do so to no effect :

Ces lévites et moi, prêts à vous secourir,  
Nous étions avec vous résolus de périr.

She goes out, not indeed content, but having learnt of the peril which threatens her. As far as the material result is concerned, it does not matter whether Joad uses her grandchild or a foundling to dethrone her. The danger is there in either case. She sees the danger, but an internal obstacle is going to prevent her from removing it.

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When she has gone Joad appears, sympathizes with Josabet, praises Joas, thanks Abner, who has not actually done anything except show good-will, and orders that the defilement of Athalie's presence be washed away with blood :

Et nous, dont cette femme impie et meurtrière  
A souillé les regards et troublé la prière,  
Rentrans : et qu'un sang pur, par mes mains épanché,  
Lave jusques au marbre où ses pieds ont touché.

He and Athalie have reason to feel in the greatest danger from each other. Nothing is yet decided.

The chorus now sings praise of Joas, wonders who he is and elaborates on the arguments he had opposed to Athalie's. One of the comparatively rare similes of Racine occurs here, a reference to nature which is, as is frequently the case in the Bible, didactic :

Tel en un secret vallon,  
Sur le bord d'une onde pure,  
Croît à l'abri de l'aquilon,  
Un jeune lis, l'amour de la nature,  
Loin du monde élevé, de tous les dons des cieux  
Il est orné dès sa naissance ;  
Et du méchant l'abord contagieux  
N'altère point son innocence.

Repetition and parallelism in its various forms, the most noticeable characteristics of biblical style, occur throughout the play.

Mathan appears in the first scene of Act III, and at his request to see Josabet the chorus takes flight. Joad's young son and, it is apparent, apt disciple, bars Mathan's way, but he, unperturbed at being described as "idolâtre impur", pacifically says that he has come at Athalie's command and will await Josabet. Mathan is accompanied by the cynical Nabal, who comments on the attitude of Zacharie and of one of the girls in the chorus :

Leurs enfants ont déjà leur audace hautaine.

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He describes the confusion of Athalie's mind and asks the reason for it. Angered by Joad's reception of her when she was already disturbed by the dream, she was going to "immoler Joad à son courroux" and replace him by Mathan, the priest of Baal. Nabal was already looking forward to his share of the booty. He is the sycophant who lurks in Mathan's shadow and who is to be expected in the trail of such a creature and, in a sense, completes his portrait. Mathan's reply to Nabal merits great attention. For whenever Athalie appears before us she is not only completely rational but highly intelligent. Her confusion is described by Abner and by Mathan, who wishes to deceive her and is telling her more of the truth than he seems to realize.

Ami, depuis deux jours, je ne la connois plus.  
Ce n'est plus cette reine éclairée, intrépide,  
Élevée au-dessus de son sexe timide,  
Qui d'abord accabloit ses ennemis surpris,  
Et d'un instant perdu connoissoit tous le prix.  
La peur d'un vain remords trouble cette grande âme :  
Elle flotte, elle hésite ; en un mot, elle est femme.  
J'avois tantôt rempli d'amertume et de fiel  
Son cœur déjà saisi des menaces du ciel ;  
Elle-même, à mes soins confiant sa vengeance,  
M'avoit dit d'assembler sa garde en diligence ;  
Mais soit que cet enfant devant elle amené,  
De ses parents, dit-on, rebut infortuné,  
Eût d'un songe effrayant diminué l'alarme,  
Soit qu'elle eût même en lui vu je ne sais quel charme,  
J'ai trouvé son courroux chancelant, incertain,  
Et déjà remettant sa vengeance à demain.  
Tous ses projets sembloient l'un l'autre se détruire.  
"Du sort de cet enfant je me suis fait instruire,  
Aï-je dit. On commence à vanter ses aïeux ;  
Joad de temps en temps le montre aux factieux,  
Le fait attendre aux Juifs, comme un autre Moïse,  
Et d'oracles menteurs s'appuie et s'autorise."  
Ces mots ont fait monter la rougeur sur son front.  
Jamais mensonge heureux n'eut un effet si prompt.

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“ Est-ce à moi de languir dans cette incertitude ?  
Sortons, a-t-elle dit, sortons d'inquiétude.  
Vous-même à Josabet prononcez cet arrêt :  
Les feux vont s'allumer, et le fer est tout prêt ;  
Rien ne peut de leur temple empêcher le ravage,  
Si je n'ai de leur foi cet enfant pour otage.”

He describes the change that he has remarked in her. He attempts to account for it, but that is not his main concern. He has reason to expect prompt action from Athalie ; he finds her hesitant. But it is to be observed that her changing attitude corresponds to the changing situation presented deceitfully by Mathan. When he first offered an interpretation of the dream, she bade him rally her soldiers. The interview with Joas disarmed her. She had a reason for not wishing to do what she saw to be necessary, she could not immediately overcome that reluctance. When she rose up and slew her grandchildren on that day she has not forgotten, she was urged on by her own loss. Her incentive was immeasurably greater than it is now. It is not her habit to kill indiscriminately, it might even be said, to kill if there seems any alternative. She has not in all these years molested the priests, although Mathan has been tempting her, and it is to be remarked that when, at the close of the play, she wrongly believes Joad and the Temple to be in her power she chooses to spare his life. It must be remembered that she would be relying on “ la foi d'un songe ” as Abner told her, if she used violence now, whereas there was absolute certainty in her mind as to what she was doing and why when she ordered the great massacre. It is to be observed that her determination to use force increases with her certainty as to its necessity. As yet, when she is putting off her vengeance, Mathan has told her only his suppositions. Seeing her hesitation, he pretends to have gained definite information and thus gives greater reality and urgency to the matter. She responds by growing angry and more unwilling to tolerate the condition of doubt. She at once



bids him take steps to bring it to an end. He is here waiting to deliver her ultimatum to Josabet.

Nabal does not believe that they will defy Athalie for the sake of a nameless child, but Mathan, in a speech striking in its concentrated venom, disagrees with him. He contrives to explain Joad's probable conduct without admiring him. He suspects that Joad knows more than he says about Joas, but in any case they will refuse and : " Je prends sur moi le reste ". Sword and fire shall deliver his sight from the Temple. Nabal wonders at his furious hatred. Is it love of Baal that moves him ? He himself, he casually puts in :

Pour moi, vous le savez, descendu d'Ismaël,  
Je ne sers ni Baal, ni le Dieu d'Israël.

Mathan, unwilling to be confused with his own dupes, tells Nabal his history. He has no faith in the worm-eaten idol he pretends to serve. He was born a Levite and were it not for the quarrel with Joad, might still be in the Temple. " La soif de commander " drove him from the Temple to the court :

J'approchai par degrés de l'oreille des rois,  
Et bientôt en oracle on érigea ma voix.  
J'étudiai leur cœur, je flattai leur caprices,  
Je leur semai de fleurs le bord des précipices.  
Près de leurs passions rien ne me fut sacré ;  
De mesure et de poids je changeois à leur gré.

When Athalie erected a temple to Baal — there is nothing in the Bible to say that she did so — Mathan, because of his zeal, is appointed priest. His triumph is summed up in the line :

Je ceignis la tiare, et marchai son égal.

But the memory of the God he has abandoned troubles him and by destroying the Temple he hopes to prove his fears groundless.

When Josabet enters he greets her with a speech that admirably illustrates the procedure he has been describing to Nabal. He is hypocrisy incarnate and he has the temerity to bid her, for

the glory of her God, tell him the truth. Her spontaneous outburst of anger is as eloquent as the rhythmic specific abuse of Joad, who now appears, and, after considerable outcry at his presence, requests him to repeat Athalie's commands. Mathan appears unable to do so, and Joad then drives him forth with a full and ready vehemence that gives the impression of having awaited this opportunity for some time :

Sors donc de devant moi, monstre d'impiété.  
De toutes tes horreurs, va, comble la mesure.  
Dieu s'apprête à te joindre à la race parjure,  
Abiron et Dathan, Doég, Achitophel.  
Les chiens, à qui son bras a livré Jézabel,  
Attendant que sur toi sa fureur se déploie,  
Déjà sont à ta porte, et demandent leur proie.

Mathan flinches before him, tries to reply, and cannot. He turns blindly from Joad, mistakes his way out and is corrected by Nabal.

When they have gone Joad and Josabet discuss the danger. Josabet suggests the possibility that Joad may be forcing the issue, that the enterprise is not timely :

Réserveons cet enfant pour un temps plus heureux.

Joad rejects her suggestion on the grounds that Jéhu, who might help them, has

Ni le cœur assez droit ni les mains assez pures.

It is not impossible that Joad forces events and does things before they can be justly done. He says :

Je veux même avancer l'heure déterminée.

Azarias now enters to tell Joad that the doors of the Temple are closed and that the " misérable troupeau ", which later is going to rejoice at Athalie's death, has now fled from the Temple in fear. Joad serenely dismisses them :

Peuple lâche, en effet, et né pour l'esclavage,  
Hardi contre Dieu seul ! Poursuivons notre ouvrage.

The girls of the chorus express their intention of remaining with

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Joad and he is deeply moved. It is now that the fervour of prophecy comes upon him, and to the sound of music he feels

Et les siècles obscurs devant moi se découvrent.

Racine has not written finer verse than that in Joad's prophecy :

Cieux, écoutez ma voix ; terre, prête l'oreille.

Ne dis plus, ô Jacob, que ton Seigneur sommeille.

Pécheurs, disparaissez : le Seigneur se réveille.

Le Seigneur a détruit la reine des cités.

It has the bare effortless grandeur of parts of the Bible.

The prophecy, as Racine points out in the Preface, is a pure invention, and a remarkably fine dramatic device : " Cette prophétie sert beaucoup à augmenter le trouble dans la pièce, par la consternation et par les différents mouvements où elle jette le chœur et les principaux acteurs ". It is necessary to remember what the effect of this divine revelation on the characters is. The vision evokes the historical importance of the crisis that is every moment approaching nearer, the meeting of Athalie and Joad upon which depends the fate of the child Joas, sole survivor of the line of David, the rightful heir to the throne and the promised ancestor of the Messiah. Nothing could be more impressive dramatically than this vision evoking the immense issues at stake just before the decisive moment. It reassures us, reminds us that all will be well, and at the same time intensifies the drama by making the whole future depend upon the averting of the present danger. It is as effective as the scene in which Phèdre is shown imprisoned in the universe, in life and in death pursued by the eyes of her relations, the judging gods. But the vision does not alter the crisis in any way. Its effect is that of a floodlight. Josabet and the chorus cannot understand what has been revealed. As soon as Joad ceases to speak Josabet asks, unenlightened :

Hélas ! d'où nous viendra cette insigne faveur,

Si les rois de qui doit descendre ce Sauveur. . . .

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Salomith, in the chorus, asks :

Le Seigneur a daigné parler.

Mais ce qu'à son prophète il vient de révéler,  
Qui pourra nous le faire entendre ?

Like Josabet, they await the future in love and faith. They believe in the omnipotence of God but do not assume that it implies their own mortal salvation.

What has Joad learnt from his vision ? It is in a note, not in the play, that Racine, not his hero, tells us that it was Joad's son Zacharie whom Joas, when he is king, is to have murdered. The other three notes inform us that Joad's vision looks forward to the Babylonian captivity, that the new Jerusalem rising out of the destruction is the Church, and that the Gentiles are

Ces enfants qu'en son sein elle n'a point portés.

Even if Joad does not realize that the dead priest is his own son, for whose death Joas, grown and crowned, is responsible, he must realize that the survival of the child Joas is implied in the vision of a Saviour descended from Joas. But the vision is hardly necessary for the purpose of informing Joad that Joas is not to die as a child. God's promise to maintain the line of David is constantly mentioned throughout the first two acts. After the magnificent coronation scene when the air is ringing with the approach of Athalie's soldiers, and Josabet says in fear to Joas,

Cher enfant, que le ciel en vain m'avoit rendu,  
Hélas ! pour vous sauver, j'ai fait ce que j'ai pu.  
Dieu ne se souvient plus de David votre père.

Joad, far from denying the possibility that all may be lost, replies :

Et quand Dieu, de vos bras l'arrachant sans retour,  
Voudroit que de David la maison fût éteinte,  
N'êtes-vous pas ici sur la montagne sainte  
Où le père des Juifs, sur son fils innocent  
Leva sans murmurer un bras obéissant.

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And to Joas he says :

Et périssez du moins en roi, s'il faut périr.

Whatever the significance of the prophecy, it has not served to inform Joad about the outcome of his enterprise. On the rational plane, as a man of action, he takes the decision without any divine sanction for it. He refers to Abraham, but the great distinction is that Abraham at the moment of action was guided by a divine command. Joad's vision in Racine's play throws no light on his actions as far as Joad is concerned. He has had no specific command to risk sacrificing Joas. He has no intuitive belief that the boy will survive. He acts, with superb courage, on his own initiative, taking every precaution : as Zacharie says in Act V :

Mais mon père défend que le Roi se hasarde.

He, too, is in doubt and continues :

Et s'il faut aujourd'hui que notre roi périsse. . . .

After the chorus has commented on the situation Josabet returns to prepare for the coronation, as Joad had ordered. Joas, forgetting part of David's history no doubt, feels unworthy when Josabet would see the crown upon him, because he is only "un malheureux enfant aux ours<sup>1</sup> abandonné", and when she weeps he expresses his willingness to appease the wrath of God by dying like Jephtha's daughter. There is no suggestion that her death had any such effect. But Joas's wrath, in the future, is going to be appeased by ordering the death of the innocent. Joad comes to reveal the secret to Joas and the gentle, gradual manner in which he prepares the child is a contrast to the brisk announcement made in the presence of the priests :

Roi, voilà vos vengeurs contre vos ennemis.

Prêtres, voilà le roi que je vous ai promis.

Joas would thank his benefactor but it is as a king rather than a grateful child that Joad wants him to appear now :

<sup>1</sup> Racine seems indifferent as to the kind of wild beast said to have threatened Joas.

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Gardez pour d'autres temps cette reconnoissance.  
Voilà donc votre roi, votre unique espérance.

Joad delivers a most rousing address, appealing to their devotion, their patriotism, their courage and pride in their office. They will go to battle :

Jusque dans son palais cherchons notre ennemie,  
and God will be with them. When he has done he sees them burning with zeal to follow him and asks them to swear loyalty. He turns to Joas and is deeply stirred at the thought of his future.

De l'absolu pouvoir vous ignorez l'ivresse,  
says Joad, who knows what he is warning him against. He wants him to swear to be a just and merciful king and Joas rather coldly does so :

Je promets d'observer ce que la loi m'ordonne.  
Mon Dieu, punissez-moi si je vous abandonne.

Zacharie kneels before him after he has been anointed and they embrace. Joad's wish,

Enfants, ainsi toujours puissiez-vous être unis !

brings to mind again the fact that Joas will have Zacharie put to death.

News is now brought that they are surrounded by Athalie's soldiers and that Abner has been imprisoned. Josabet despairs but Joad is calm and assigns each man his post, bidding him guard it with his life. His forces are marshalled to meet Athalie's. The chorus calls upon God to protect them as of old. It has linked the five acts of the play and does not appear again.

The last act is opened by Zacharie, who describes the coronation of Joas to his sister and paints the boy already playing his part admirably :

Lui, parmi ces transports, affable et sans orgueil,  
A l'un tendoit la main, flattoit l'autre de l'œil,  
Juroit de se régler par leurs avis sincères,  
Et les appeloit tous ses pères ou ses frères.

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He tells Salomith that the secret has not gone beyond the Temple. The danger comes nearer every moment and the children prepare to face it. Then an urgent beating upon one of the doors makes Salomith ask :

Le temple est-il forcé ?

But it is Abner. Athalie had imprisoned him, fearing that he might prevent her orders from being carried out. When the Temple is surrounded by her soldiers she releases him :

Dieu dans ce cœur cruel sait seul ce qui se passe.  
Elle m'a fait venir, et d'un air égaré :  
" Tu vois de mes soldats tout ce temple entouré,  
Dit-elle. Un feu vengeur va le réduire en cendre,  
Et ton Dieu contre moi ne le sauroit défendre.  
Ses prêtres toutefois, mais il faut se hâter,  
A deux conditions peuvent se racheter :  
Qu'avec Éliacin on mette en ma puissance  
Un trésor dont je sais qu'ils ont la connoissance,  
Par votre roi David autrefois amassé,  
Sous le sceau du secret au grand prêtre laissé.  
Va, dis-leur qu'à ce prix je leur permets de vivre."

The problem that confronted Athalie after her interview with Joas confronts her still. She wants Joas and she wants to be safe. She has not accepted Mathan's principle that a monarch's safety depends on " un prompt supplice " :

On le craint, tout est examiné.

She is unwilling to sacrifice either of her desires to the other and is doing all she can to obtain both. She has not Mathan's belief in the omnipotence of God and so is free from his urge to disprove it by destroying the Temple. She is feeling the psychological consequences of having " vengé mes parents sur ma postérité ". She is divided against herself ; having harmed what it was natural for her to love most, she is cut off from her nearest kin, for which, on sight, she feels an involuntary affection and, on recognition, a reasoned enmity. She sends Abner,

the least antagonizing emissary at her disposal, to demand Joas and the treasure — which is not only valuable but a symbol of her rival's power : “ Par votre roi David autrefois amassé ”, although she may not consciously attach this significance to it. Her greed for the treasure is often criticized on the count of being a very late introduction of a new element into the drama. It does not appear so if considered in this light, and in any case “ pour l'or sa soif insatiable ” is mentioned in the first scene of the play. Abner advises Joad to give her the treasure but does not mention the child until Joad presses him, and then he replies at some length. His main point is :

Quand vous périrez tous, en périra-t-il moins ?

Abner now introduces doubt as to Athalie's intentions :

Qui sait ce qu'il réserve à votre Éliacin,  
Et si, lui préparant un semblable destin,  
Il n'a point de pitié déjà rendu capable  
De nos malheureux rois l'homicide implacable ?  
Du moins, et Josabet, comme moi, l'a pu voir,  
Tantôt à son aspect je l'ai vu s'émouvoir ;  
J'ai vu de son courroux tomber la violence.

Josabet is silent ; it is too late to trust Athalie, the boy is already crowned. Probably she would not have trusted her in any case. But the suggestion has been made that Athalie's dream could have led not to her death but to a better life. The past that makes Athalie naturally and wrongly accept Joad's safe-conduct makes Joad equally naturally and, it may be, equally wrongly, distrust Athalie.

At Abner's impassioned argument that they could hardly risk more for Joas were he their king, Josabet softly urges Joad : “ Que ne lui parlez-vous ? ” But he has a reason for not doing so and at his measured answer :

Il n'est pas temps, Princesse.



Abner thinks that he does not realize the danger and paints it :

Mathan près d'Athalie étincelant de rage,  
Demande le signal et presse le carnage.

Joad, who always shows wonderful understanding of Abner, tells him :

De votre cœur, Abner, je connois l'équité.

He shall be judge of the boy's fate. Joad is now able to diminish until it is negligible the great danger he had been willing to face. He has Abner, unsuspecting, lead Athalie almost unattended into the Temple. He deliberately gives Abner a wrong impression and Abner is thus spared the degradation of betraying Athalie to her death :

De ses plus braves chefs qu'elle entre accompagnée ;  
Mais de nos saints autels qu'elle tienne éloignée  
D'un ramas d'étrangers l'indiscrète fureur.  
Du pillage du temple épargnez-moi l'horreur.  
Des prêtres, des enfants lui feroient-ils quelque ombre ?  
De sa suite avec vous qu'elle règle le nombre.  
Et quant à cet enfant si craint, si redouté. . . .

He implies that she will be safe accompanied by her warriors whilst, giving a plausible reason for limiting their number, he tries to ensure that she will not. He points out that she is in no danger from priests and children whilst trusting that this will prove untrue. By saying " Et quant à cet enfant ", when he has already discussed the treasure, he gives the impression that the two are not the same. Racine defends Joad's ruse by giving a precedent for the use of figurative language : " Les trésors de l'Église ", when treasure in the ordinary sense is not meant, and says that God commanded Moses to deceive Pharaoh : " Dieu a trompé exprès Pharaon ". Apart from the consideration that divine action presupposes omniscience and is not measurable by standards of conduct that do not, it is nevertheless not without significance that the deception Racine quotes brought about a

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liberation and not a death. It was the subsequent pursuit of Pharaoh, natural under the circumstances, but, we are told, inspired by God, which led to his destruction. The circumstances of Joad's decisions are different. His vision does not force him into any particular line of action. Throughout the play he contemplates the possibility that God may abandon His declared purpose. At the end of the play he tries to accomplish it by main force. The results of his action, a mixture of good and evil characteristic of the means used to obtain them, are several times brought to mind by Racine.

When Abner has gone to lead Athalie back to her doom Joad says :

Grand Dieu ! voici ton heure, on t'amène ta proie !

Even the magnificent defiance of Athalie at the brink of death cannot render her worthy of this great Opponent, unless He be reduced to the shape of Joad's personality. And she is not utterly vanquished. Athalie's spirit prevails in Joas. It is not suggested that Joas kills Zacharie only because Joad had killed Athalie, but the example may well have been the decisive factor. Joad now gives his final orders. All is to be still as the Queen approaches : Joas is to be hidden. As soon as she enters the Temple the doors must close behind her and her waiting soldiers be scattered in alarm. Then the news of Joas's survival may be published and the people rallied to his aid. As Joas is placed upon his throne and concealed by a much-criticized curtain, Joad observes the door open and Josabet pales. He has time to notice this too : " Vous changez de couleur, Princesse ? " She fears to the last and considers Athalie's escort too great, but Joad, who feels

L'ange exterminateur est debout avec nous,

has seen the door close again and pronounces at last : " Tout est en sûreté ".

Athalie has trusted Abner, and not without reason. He is

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acting in good faith. That she is wrong to trust Joad has surprised generations of commentators. Mathan had said :

Josabet livreroit même sa propre vie,  
S'il falloit que sa vie à sa sincérité  
Coûtât le moindre mot contre la vérité.

His insolence in attempting to put her to the test should not obscure the point that even their enemies account Josabet and Joad generally truthful. It is not strange that Athalie should accept the word of Joad. He had given her to understand that they were to parley. There seems no sign of weakness, age or lessened will in her incisive summoning :

Te voilà, séducteur,  
De ligue, de complots pernicieux auteur,  
Qui dans le trouble seul as mis tes espérances,  
Éternel ennemi des suprêmes puissances.  
En l'appui de ton Dieu tu t'étois reposé.  
De ton espoir frivole es-tu désabusé ?  
Il laisse en mon pouvoir et son temple et ta vie.  
Je devrois, sur l'autel où ta main sacrifie,  
Te . . . Mais du prix qu'on m'offre il faut me contenter.  
Ce que tu m'as promis, songe à l'exécuter.  
Cet enfant, ce trésor, qu'il faut qu'on me remette,  
Où sont-ils ?

Nor is she urged to violence to demonstrate authority. She feels that she can do her will but she restrains herself. Joad does not try to match her arrogance, he answers with effective simplicity :

Sur-le-champ tu seras satisfaite :  
Je te les vais montrer l'un et l'autre à la fois.

He draws back the curtain. Athalie sees Joas enthroned, Azarias, with drawn sword on his left, Joad's children kneeling before him and armed priests on either side. It is Racine's most spectacular scene. Joad presents him to her : " Voilà ton roi, ton fils, le fils d'Okosias ". He briefly tells how Joas was saved

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and announces that this is the treasure. Athalie bids her soldiers rid her of this "fantôme odieux", but Joad calls on his hidden priests, "soldats du Dieu vivant", and they appear armed on the stage. Now Athalie is dismayed and cries :

Où suis-je ? O trahison ! ô reine infortunée.  
D'armes et d'ennemis je suis environnée.

And Joad tells her :

Tes yeux cherchent en vain, tu ne peux échapper,  
Et Dieu de toutes parts a su t'envelopper.  
Ce Dieu que tu bravois, en nos mains t'a livrée.  
Rends-lui compte du sang dont tu t'es enivrée.

The announcement terrifies her soldiers, but Athalie does not feel that it absolves Abner. Joad says : " Dieu a su t'envelopper ", but she puts the matter less delicately : " dans quel piège as-tu conduit mes pas ? " He is innocent and sincerely protests :

Reine, Dieu m'est témoin . . .

but she wants no protestations and vigorously bids him

Laisse-là ton Dieu, traître,

Et venge-moi.

But Abner kneels at the feet of Joas. He would not betray Athalie but he cannot do her bidding now :

Sur qui ? Sur Joas ! sur mon maître !

Still she is not cowed. " Lui Joas ? lui ton roi ? " She hears her soldiers coming to her aid, calling from outside the Temple. But it is Ismaël who comes to tell Joad that the enemy is put to flight and they are free. The priests have proclaimed the son of Okosias king and told of his rescue by Josabet and of Athalie's capture. Then everywhere at the same moment the trumpet called and its blasts and the cries of the priests spread terror among the army, whose general is absent and whose queen is said to be dethroned. It is a *coup d'état*. They take flight and some

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of the Jews do likewise. Those who remain accept Joas and bless the Lord Who sent him. The temple of Baal is destroyed and Mathan is killed.

When Athalie has heard him out she accepts defeat. Her last speech lingers in the memory :

Dieu des Juifs, tu l'emportes !  
Oui, c'est Joas, je cherche en vain à me tromper.  
Je reconnois l'endroit où je le fis frapper ;  
Je vois d'Okosias et le port et le geste :  
Tout me retrace enfin un sang que je déteste.  
David, David triomphe ; Achab seul est détruit.  
Impitoyable Dieu, toi seul as tout conduit.  
C'est toi qui, me flattant d'une vengeance aisée,  
M'as vingt fois en un jour à moi-même opposée,  
Tantôt pour un enfant excitant mes remords,  
Tantôt m'éblouissant de tes riches trésors,  
Que j'ai craint de livrer aux flammes, au pillage.  
Qu'il règne donc ce fils, ton soin et ton ouvrage ;  
Et que pour signaler son empire nouveau,  
On lui fasse en mon sein enfoncer le couteau.  
Voici ce qu'en mourant lui souhaite sa mère :  
Que dis-je, souhaiter ? je me flatte, j'espère  
Qu'indocile à ton joug, fatigué de ta loi,  
Fidèle au sang d'Achab, qu'il a reçu de moi,  
Conforme à son aïeul, à son père semblable,  
On verra de David l'héritier détestable  
Abolir tes honneurs, profaner ton autel,  
Et venger Athalie, Achab et Jézabel.

Joad has told her :

Ce Dieu que tu bravois, en nos mains t'a livrée.

And Athalie agrees :

Impitoyable Dieu, toi seul as tout conduit.

His success is taken as divine approval, as hers had been in the fifth scene of Act II when, reviewing her success as queen, she had said :

Le ciel même a pris soin de me justifier.

And when God, scrupulously holding the balance between Achab and David, allows her terrible curse to be fulfilled, when her grandson Joas, prompted by his maternal ancestry, and if not following at least undeterred by the High Priest's example in dealing with opposition, has Zacharie, the High Priest's son, killed, is God again passing judgment? Athalie speaks of her conflicting desires, her pity for the child, her greed for the treasure: "que j'ai craint de livrer aux flammes, au pillage". With the means at her disposal, when Mathan first tempted her she could, had greed been the only reason that kept her from destruction, have attempted to sack it first and burn it afterwards. But she did not. Certainly Athalie is a cruel woman with a most rudimentary sense of justice and the actions she considers right are undoubtedly wrong. She richly deserves destruction as harmful even if not punishment as guilty. That a good impulse should contribute towards her downfall is highly *vraisemblable*. If a criminal is undeterred by any decent tendencies he will obviously be a more efficient and successful criminal, and it will be more difficult to bring him to book. But the usual view of *Athalie* is not that life is taking its course, but, on the contrary, that there is divine intervention in the normal course of events. It is highly probable, it is characteristic of life, that what is at all temperate or pitiful in Athalie should make it easier to overcome her. Are we to understand that God inspires Joad to choose the easiest, the most typical way? Miracles need not necessarily go against nature or human nature, the timeliness of an event may seem miraculous. But if there is nothing at all unusual in Joad's idea, is it quite impossible that he could have thought of it by himself? Are we to consider that for a good man to have a thought less noble that is customary for him, God must have inspired it? It is not to be decided arbitrarily that God did or did not inspire Joad and did or did not approve the outcome of events. Racine is a dramatist, his philosophy is given only by implication, by the necessarily

arbitrary selection involved in a work of art and by the relative emphasis on the various factors. To reason out the Will of God from the whole universe, or justifiably question divine action — it should be remembered that *Athalie* is a bold improvisation based on a biblical story barely outlined, told without comment — requires omniscience on the part of the inquirer, and Racine does not attempt to do so. He demonstrates, he does not moralize, within the framework of his selected circumstances. Everywhere in his last play Racine introduces, not the presence of God, but man looking for it. Are we to take *Athalie*'s defeat as a demonstration of divine wrath, to understand that God sanctions Joad's behaviour by allowing *Athalie* to be killed? As Josabet points out, he has allowed many other kings to be killed; and Zacharie in the future is to be killed. Joad, who is said to be in direct communication with God, does not know whether God's promise is to be annulled. Josabet suggests the possibility that Joad may be forcing the issue, that the enterprise is not timely. It is not to be ruled out that he forces events, does things before they can be justly done. Racine has even introduced doubt as to *Athalie*'s intention. Abner compares Joas with Moses and suggests that God may intend a similar fate for *Athalie*'s grandchild. The suggestion may be a dangerous one but it is made in good faith. Everyone in the play, Joad, Josabet, Abner, *Athalie*, is shown in a different relationship to God. Mathan is the only one who knows what is right, and, in the hope of greater happiness, chooses to do wrong. His long self-portrait has been considered unnecessary. It affords a standard of comparison useful in considering *Athalie*. Each character gives a different view of the situation. Racine has given a remarkably complete picture of human activity in a traditional setting whether or not he intended to demonstrate divine control over it. He has, perhaps unwittingly, included natural explanations of what he may have intended to be supernatural events.

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The supernatural in *Athalie* floodlights the action of the play. It is commentary rather than cause. It draws the future down to its root in the present in Joad's case and the past in Athalie's. In the other plays of Racine the present is examined as the result of an implicit and comparatively arbitrary past. Here there is the most explicit statement of the relationship between man and his fate. What is tragic about the death of Athalie is not that it occurs but that it occurs when it does. What exactly is Athalie's sin? Is it ignorance? A certain amount of ignorance, since they are human, is to be found in every other person in the play. She does not immediately still a better feeling, no matter how slight, how momentary, that stirs in her heart. But her death occurs when she must consider such a feeling an error, part of a trick which has been played on her, a trick which, if it is of divine origin, bears little trace of that origin. Such feelings are not for her, and if for a moment they occur, they serve only to contribute to her fate, to confirm her in her view of God and man. It is not that she must die but that she must die cursing, a curse that is fulfilled, unaware of justice in God, seeing Him as merely stronger. She feels that she must die not because she has killed but because she has omitted to kill. That made it possible to vanquish her, it is the means but not the cause of her annihilation. She sees God as the petty spiteful tribal patron to whom, defeated but undismayed and guiltless in her own eyes, she says :

Dieu des Juifs, tu l'emportes.

If we accept the action of the play as due to divine intervention, then we have taken Athalie's way of seeing God. He is a pagan god choosing races instead of families for his purpose. He inspires Joad to act, yet exacts Zacharie's death as penalty or payment ; the blood of the races, chosen and damned, is mixed to one blood, human and erring and doomed to call down the divine wrath by the very law of its being. The salvation of the house of David is put on a level with the destruction of the house



of Oedipus in *La Thébàïde*, Racine's first play. It is to accept a God no more merciful and no more just than the gods of Phaedra and Jocasta. Just or unjust, He remains omnipotent and on our side, but our interest is more in the nature of a political loyalty, a party spirit, than religious love for the perfect wisdom and goodness of God. In the Bible and also in the doctrine of the Jansenists we are allowed to take these for granted. They are often felt to be beyond the understanding of man but there is the constant sense of their presence. In *Athalie* we are not allowed to take their presence for granted. Racine, if he demonstrates the doctrine of the Jansenists seems to proclaim its injustice. We are not allowed passively to accept what happens as right. Speculation is provoked. The case of the victim, the possibilities that might have come to fruition, are given more prominence. There is not the security of being able to accept what did happen as the only or even as the best outcome. We are convinced that it is well that *Athalie* should perish and Joad prevail, but made to speculate at the manner of her death. Racine has not chosen to show an *Athalie* of diminished intelligence, but rather one whom Joad must depart from his usual way of life to deceive.

Joad did his best. But that is not to say that what he did was just. It looks very like a human best. If nothing else was possible, a far more serious question arises than the one as to the nobility of Joad's character, the question, Is justice practical? For although it may be just that *Athalie* should die, it is not just that Joad should kill her at that time, under the circumstances imagined by Racine. In the Bible there is no pity in *Athalie*, no deceit in Joad. The history of man illustrates the assumption that justice is not always practical, and it is a very bloody history. Joad chooses a means that is expedient rather than just to bring about an end desirable in itself. He is allowed to close the play. Does it appear that the world is so ordained that there is, when time reveals it, nothing more expedient

than justice ? When the priests follow Athalie to kill her, Joad says :

Qu'à l'instant hors du temple elle soit emmenée,  
 Et que la sainteté n'en soit point profanée.  
 Allez, sacrés vengeurs de vos princes meurtris,  
 De leur sang par sa mort faire cesser les cris.  
 Si quelque audacieux embrasse sa querelle,  
 Qu'à la fureur du glaive on le livre avec elle.

But has not the Temple, that symbol of an ideal, been profaned already ? It is interesting to notice Racine's remark that the death of Zacharie, which Joad sees in the vision and either does not recollect or endeavours to suppress afterwards, as it appears from what he says to the two boys, was one of the principal causes of God's anger against the Jews and of their subsequent misfortunes, and mentions the belief that from that day the voice of God was heard no longer in His sanctuary. Joad is shown the result of the means he is going to employ. His vision contains a warning as ineffectual as the warning in Athalie's dream, that she had forfeited by the consequences of being Jezebel's daughter the opportunity of obtaining what she was going to discover was her desire. God's promise will be kept, but the means of ensuring this, that Joad will employ, will lead to disaster. Joad would be willing—he is noble and generous—to sacrifice his son, and it is usually assumed that God is requiring this. Abraham is often cited as an example. It should be remembered, and Joad does not seem to remember it, that Abraham was required to be willing to offer up his son, he was not allowed to sacrifice him. A moral often drawn from this story is that God, whilst demonstrating Abraham's willingness to make the sacrifice, revealed that He did not desire it to be made. Joad did not see that God could or would permit a purer means of preserving the child. Has Joad won the full sanction of his own mind, and is this foreseeing of consequences indicative of an ineffectual protest from his deepest being ? While Athalie is

being dispatched off-stage, Joas prays :

Dieu, qui voyez mon trouble et mon affliction,  
Détournez loin de moi sa malédiction,  
Et ne souffrez jamais qu'elle soit accomplie.  
Faites que Joas meure avant qu'il vous oublie.

We are not allowed to forget that her execution is taking place during this prayer which is not answered. Joad inquires into her death and is informed :

Le fer a de sa vie expié les horreurs.  
Jérusalem, longtemps en proie à ses fureurs,  
De son joug odieux à la fin soulagée,  
Avec joie en son sang la regarde plongée.

But we have not even the satisfaction of being able to accept this as an unbiased account, as representative of what appears in the rest of the play. Her "fureurs", to which Racine could easily have given reality had he wished, are not emphasized with regard to the populace at large. There is a mention of "leurs fureurs" in Mathan's long speech to Nabal, but only the erection of the temple to Baal is directly related to Athalie and this would naturally outrage the priests most. The reaction of the populace, as in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, loses significance because of their fickleness. They appear fickle to Abner, cowardly to Joad, and easily led to Mathan. The last lines of the play, spoken by Joad to Joas, so that we are once more reminded that he will not obey them, are :

Par cette fin terrible, et due à ses forfaits,  
Apprenez, roi des Juifs, et n'oubliez jamais  
Que les rois dans le ciel ont un juge sévère,  
L'innocence un vengeur, et l'orphelin un père.

Racine sums up the tragedy by reminding us that the example has not this effect. We saw Abner unconsciously laying more stress on the material existence of the Temple than on the values it symbolized. Joad does not do this. But he seems to have infringed the Law in his very laudable desire to ensure its pre-

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servation. He makes a slight exception for the sake of a great benefit, and Racine has shown in *Bérénice* his appreciation of the Roman conception of the sanctity of law. He treats there an instance where there seems every justification for making an exception and shows the point of view which holds an exception nevertheless impermissible. One cannot infringe a law without decreasing its effectiveness. He gives in *Athalie* the impression, not of pointing an obvious moral, but of seeing a great truth implacably reveal itself.

*Athalie* is Racine's most comprehensive play, the fullest encirclement of his mind in the universe.

THE END

